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# editorial

## Return of the Ascended One

Some time has elapsed since we last heard anything of the Hierophant, the mysterious and sardonic ascended master who dwelt for many years in his Fortress of Arrogance, high in the Himalayas, whence he would send forth his regular barbs railing against every form of flummery and obfuscation. As we reported in FT193, visitors to the Hierophant's remote Himalayan abode were simply informed, by one or another of the great man's apprentices, that the master "was not at home". The rest – apart from the occasional rumoured sighting in Argentina and Paraguay – was silence. Until now.

At the beginning of the year, we received an unassuming looking envelope, bearing a Worthing postmark, that looked for all the world like one of the politer forms of "green ink" correspondence we are all too used to opening on a daily basis. Imagine our surprise, then, on finding that the letter within was from a man calling himself 'The Hierophant' and residing, it seemed, on Britain's south coast.

The mysterious missive told the story of his sudden departure from the Fortress of Arrogance, precipitated, according to the letter writer, by a palace coup in which the apprentices were working hand in glove with either President Bush, the Chinese, or both. The letter went on to relate the rest of the sorry tale:

*Barely a day passed before my Tibetan visa was revoked, whereupon I was bundled into a truck and, in due course and after severe discomfort, dumped at the border.*

*Reader, I walked. I shall not tire you with accounts of my strange experiences in Minsk, or what I saw slithering beneath the pavements of Beirut, or whom, most unexpectedly, I met in a bordello on the shores of the Caspian – although few would not recognize that floppy lock of hair, the dazzling blue eyes and the infectious laugh, still fewer would suspect the reason for his presence there, or the shattering effect it had on the great events of the day: all that is another story. All I need say is that at last, after many adventures, some of them intriguingly sordid, I reached these shores.*

*For reasons possibly best known to Mr GORDON BROWN and the unspeakable ingrates of the British Secret Intelligence Service, I am reduced to living in Worthing. That is not a misprint. It says Worthing. Not far from the railway station as a matter of fact, but far, far further than one would like from the laundrette (for yes, one is reduced to that, too), a decently reeking Greasy Spoon or a even half-bearable tavern, no matter how mean.*

*In a boarding house, in fact; which, like something translated into a time warp out of an account by George Orwell, smells mostly of boiled cabbage and boot polish, and intermittently of bleach, decaying flesh, and cheap perfume. The food is atrocious, the beds decrepit, the windows filthy, the stairs unwashed and far from silent, and the*

*landlady—who calls herself Mrs de Frietas—is obese, vulgar, and combative. There appears to be no trace of any Mr de Frietas, and may never have been any, although I admit to not yet having searched the cellars. None of my fellow "guests" appears to speak English. They smile and nod patronisingly, not to say pityingly, when I greet them at mealtimes and remark with my habitual discrimination on the weather and its prospects. In the evenings, they gape slack-mouthed at the gargantuan television, gazing exclusively at football matches with demented commentaries in indecipherable tongues, some of which may well be entirely ersatz.*

*My mind and nerves have been reduced, frayed, frizzled, scraped raw by these experiences of injustice, ingratitude and squalor. Remorseless misanthropy and cynicism seem to me the mildest of all possible responses to the degeneracy and depravity of the age and of the nation. Prepare to take your medicine.*

Was this, indeed, the Hierophant of old? While the exquisitely turned phrases and biting wit seemed unchanged, a note of hysteria – of madness, even – seemed to permeate the letter from start to finish. Clearly – if the letter writer was indeed our long-lost Ascended One, then his experiences of the last 18 months had left him a changed and embittered man.

And then, as we went to press, another communication arrived – the first, the 'Hierophant' explained, in a new series of regular columns announcing his return to these hallowed pages. So, as of next issue, you'll be able to make up your own minds – is the Hierophant back? Is he of sound mind? Or are we the victims of a rank impostor, delusional fraud or unscrupulous mountebank?

### ERRATUM

FT207:44-47 – the article "A Fortean Album" was by Doug Skinner, as correctly stated in the introduction and on the Contents page. Unfortunately, due to an editorial error, Gary Lachman's biography was printed at the end of the piece. Our apologies to both Doug and Gary.

DAVID SUTTON

BOB RICKARD

PAUL SIEVEKING

## Why fortean?

Everything you always wanted to know about Fortean Times but were too paranoid to ask!

SEE PAGE 78

# YOUR DAYS ARE NUMBERED!

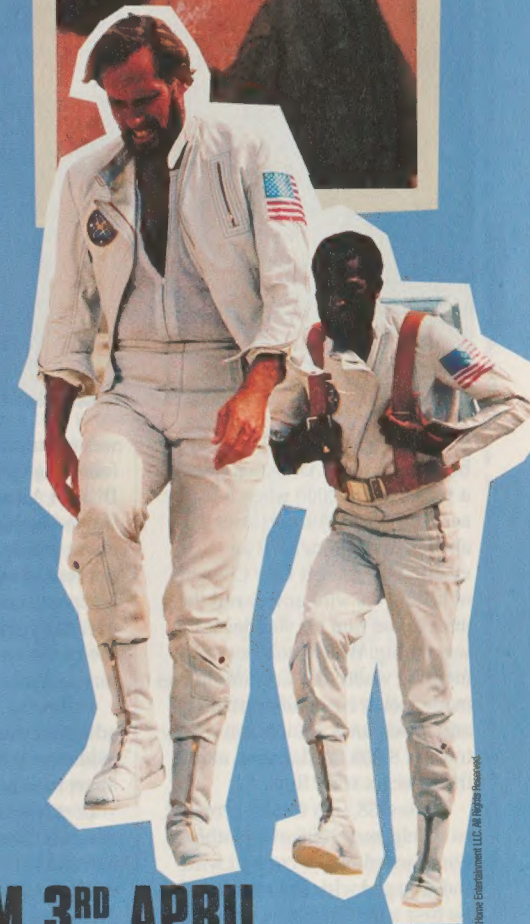
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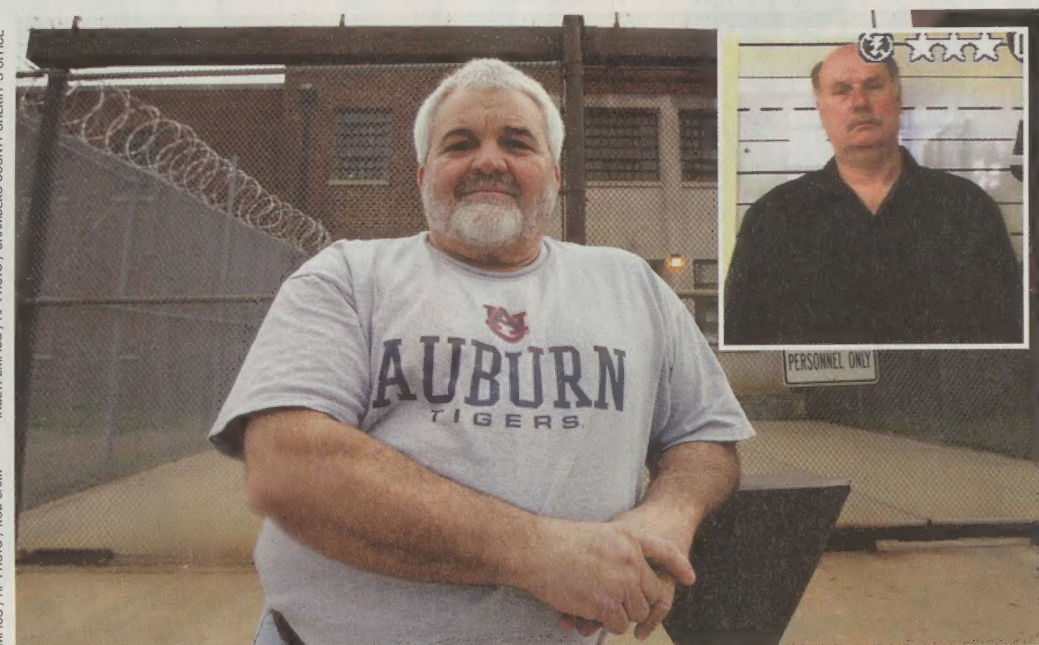
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# strangedays

## When dreams come true

Dreams finger a wife-killer and a football fan predicts the unlikeliest of goals



Rod Spraggins (above), a bail bondsman from Alabama, caused a sensation in 2000 when he accused Barry Waites (inset above), his opponent in an election for Lanett City Council, of killing his wife and dared the man to sue him for slander if he was wrong. Waites was not at the meeting where the accusation was made, never responded publicly and never sued. Lanett is a sleepy town of 8,000 in Alabama, along the Georgia state line.

Waites, 58, was finally arrested on 9 February 2006 at a clothing store owned by his current wife and charged with the murder of his first wife Charlotte, who was found strangled and with a blow to the head on 4 August 1998 at their split-level home in Lanett. Police Chief Ron Docimo would not comment on exactly what led to the arrest, saying that it

was a "culmination of years of following up on leads and tips". District Attorney E Paul Jones started looking into old cases about a year ago, he said, and a lieutenant within his department had continued working the case over the years. Jones estimated the case would go before a grand jury in about October.

Following the arrest, Spraggins admitted that he never had any evidence to make the accusation apart from what Charlotte Waites had told him in a series of dreams. "She started appearing to me within the first weeks of her death," he said, adding that the dreams prompted him to enter the City Council race for the sole purpose of making the accusation. (Neither man was elected.)

Waites was serving as interim mayor when 49-year-old Charlotte Waites was murdered. Within a

## Waites's wife appeared in a series of dreams

week, the police told her brother, Gene Brown, that Waites was the prime suspect. Brown said the couple had numerous financial problems during their 28-year marriage and he believed an argument over money resulted in her death. In 2002, Waites was jailed for six months after pleading guilty to taking money from a National Guard armoury where he worked. Brown credited Spraggins with keeping up public

pressure on police to solve the murder case. "Rod had it pegged from the beginning," he said. "I had doubts about his methods. But he's got guts." [AP] WorldNow and WTVM, 10 Feb 2006.

Football fan Adrian Hayward won £25,000 after dreaming that Liverpool's Xabi Alonso scored a goal from his own half. After the dream in July 2005, he placed a £200 bet, at odds of 125-1, that Alonso would score from behind the halfway line at some point this season. His dream turned into reality on 7 January 2006 when the Spaniard scored against Luton Town in the FA Cup third round. "I've never placed such a large bet before but I had a feeling about it," said Mr Hayward, a 42-year-old father-of-two from Newbury, Berkshire. Bookmaker Paddy Power said: "When he placed the bet we thought it was the easiest £200 we had ever made. But fair play to him. It's great when these unusual bets pay out and it shows that dreams do come true." BBC News, 10 Jan 2006.

Mike Dash, FT's one-time co-editor and publisher, writes: "Goals from behind the halfway line are scored about once every five to 10 years at this sort of level of football. The last two of note were scored by Beckham for Manchester United vs. Wimbledon in 1996, and Nayim for Real Zaragoza in 1995. In fact, it's not common at any level. I've been playing football regularly since I was six and I have seen it happen precisely once in what must be well over 1,500 games. So to guess the player likely to do it, and then even get the season right, is really remarkable."



### GHOSTLY FORM

More spooky events at Hamlet's castle and in the class photo  
PAGE 6



### DEAD MEN WALKING

Returns from the grave give the relatives a fright  
PAGE 10



### DOUBLE-TAKE

Some startling revelations from the JFK autopsy report  
PAGE 18

## Tree-house husbands

For some men, a quarrel is just an excuse to return to living in the forest

Kapila Pradhan, 45, a resident of Nagajhara village in the eastern Indian state of Orissa, left home after an apparent tiff with his wife. "My son and daughter-in-law quarrelled constantly after their son was born and their relationship soured day by day," said his mother Sishula. "One morning I found my son had left the house while everybody was still asleep."

A month later, villagers found him deep in the forest living in a tree. "I went to the forest to bring him back home, but he refused," said Sishula. Domestic strife had intensified when Kapila's wife, Tulasi, began having "illicit relations" with his younger brother Babuan. Soon after Kapila left home, Babuan moved in with Tulasi and they had a child a few years later.

Kapila is still living in a tree 15 years later (right). He survives on whatever he can find to eat. "Since I left home I have hardly had any cooked food," he said from his tree-house 25ft (7.6m) from the ground. Sometimes villagers take food to him during festivals, but no amount of coaxing can make him come down. Even during a devastating cyclone in 1999 when winds of 190mph (305km/h) destroyed large parts of Orissa and killed thousands, Kapila continued to live in the forest. He recalls his terror as heavy rain brought down nearby trees one by one. "I just survived as a tree missed me by inches," he said. But it was the threat posed by wild elephants and monkeys that forced him to move to another tree closer to the edge of the forest, near a village. BBC News, 25 Jan 2006.

Delving into the forteen archives for precedents, we find:

Nanku, a 35-year-old father of three in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh went to live in a tree in February 1997 to protest at his wife's alleged infidelity. She stayed with him in the tree for three days trying to persuade him

Food and drink were hoisted to him every day, using a makeshift pulley. No one, including his wife, knew why he had climbed the tree or why he wouldn't come down. [AFP] 11 Sept 1997.

Another Indonesian, Bungkas the birdman of Madura Island, had been living up a palm tree

for 22 years at the time of our report [FT63:34]. He climbed the tree in 1970 after the death of his wife. He built himself a makeshift nest 45ft (14m) above the ground, and his family sent up food in a bucket three times a day, while he sent down his waste and any other rubbish.

Michael Balama, a Nigerian farmer, spent five years up a tree after a row with one of his two wives in 1987. He came down in February 1992, rowed with his other wife and ran away. He was found up an olive tree on top of a mountain and said he couldn't come down because of "spirits". [FT63:32].

On 1 December 2000, Abdel Kader, 38, marked the fifth anniversary of his move into a palm tree where he had lived since his wife kicked him out. His tree house on the outskirts of Algiers was a venue for sightseers whose cash gifts were his only income. "I am much happier here than in my flat," he said. "No noisy wife or children. I'll never go back." D.Express, 2 Dec 2000. See also FT144:10 for Antonio Mollo, Rome's "metropolitan Tarzan".



## EXTRA EXTRA

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM NEWSPAPERS AROUND THE WORLD

### UNIVERSE 'TOO QUEER' TO GRASP

BBC News, 12 July 2005.

### ISLANDERS OFFER BACKING TO ATTACK VICTIM'S FAMILY

Guernsey Press, 19 July 2005.

### DEAD DANCER'S AUDITION BLOW

Wolverhampton Express & Star, 20 July 2005.

### SEWAGE-MUNCHERS ON TRIAL

Guernsey Press, 21 July 2005.

### GIANT TIGER POUNCES ON PRINCESS

Kingston (Ontario) Whig-Standard, 21 July 2005.

### ONE MONTH TO BEAT THE YOBBS - POLICE

Hythe (Kent) Herald, 21 July 2005.

### DRAGON EATS LANDMINES

Western Daily Press, 27 July 2005

### LOCAL BUS COMPANIES ARE 'RUN BY MARTIANS'

Hull Advertiser, 28 July 2005.

### RHUBARB WOMAN GETS CUSTODY

Yorkshire Evening Press, — Aug 2005.

### DOCTOR KEEPS DEMONS AT BAY

Adelaide Advertiser, 3 Aug 2005.

### RUSSIANS HOP FOR JOY OVER KANGAROO SAUSAGE

Chicago (IL) Sun-Times, 3 Aug 2005.

### VICTIM FORCED TO SLEEP WITH IRON BAR

Adelaide City Messenger, 4 Aug 2005.

### SAFETY CAMPAIGNERS BUMP OFF SLEEPING POLICEMEN

Observer, 14 Aug 2005.





# Mixing with spirits

Ghostly goings-on and strange Scandinavian sagas

## HAMLET'S CASTLE HAUNTED

Something spooky is going on at the Danish castle that inspired Shakespeare to make it the setting for *Hamlet*. Since it opened inside the castle of Kronborg at Helsingør ("Elsinore") in June 2005, the tourist café Kronværket has been infested with spirits or poltergeists. "Windows and doors fly open, stacks of paper disappear and reappear elsewhere, and tables set themselves," said Jeannett Pedersen of the café staff. Two staff members are also reported to have witnessed inexplicable grey shadows waft by and another claims to have seen the ghost of an old man in the kitchen. A medium, Brigitte Graae, agreed to try and exorcise the ghosts, or at least talk some sense into them. According to her, there are 12 or 13 ghosts in the café, and some of them might disapprove of a café business in the royal castle. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 Dec; *Skånska Dagbladet*, 24 Dec 2005.

*Skånska Dagbladet* also speculates that the most famous spirit of them all, the ghost of Hamlet's father, might also face eviction. *FT* correspondent Sven Rosén writes: "The only historical source of information on Hamlet and his domestic problems is *Gesta Danorum*, written by Saxo Grammaticus in the 12th century. According to him, Hamlet was the son of Queen Gerutha and King Horvendel. The king was murdered by his brother Fengo (Shakespeare renamed him Claudius), who married Gerutha and ascended the throne. As he was an Odinist, it was Hamlet's duty to avenge his father (even though the vendetta had to run within the family), but in order to do so, and to

## Staff say that inexplicable grey shadows waft by



preserve his own life, he pretended to be mad.

"How much truth there is in this story is anybody's guess. Saxo didn't invent his stories, but his sources are not always first class. Construction of the castle at Helsingør began in the 1420s, probably more than 500 years after Hamlet's possible lifetime. King Horvendel's spirit may of course have moved into the castle after it was built – if he found

the place nicer and more comfortable to his station in death."

## THE GHOST IN THE BACK ROW

According to tradition, Stockport Grammar School (near Manchester) is haunted. Although the school was founded in 1487, it has been at its present Buxton road site only since 1916. A spectral something is felt in the Victorian convent house; students of English and music report hearing footsteps on the floor above, but when they investigate, no one is there; and the caretaker's dog will not enter the building.

The most tangible 'proof' of haunting occurred in 1964 when the biennial school photograph was taken (detail at left). Sixth formers occupied an elevated position on the back row, but peering between them is a man or woman in what looks like a 1920s hat. The face is in front of the window, to the left of the main entrance doors, but it is outside, rather than in the school behind the glass. To reach the height of the back row of the photograph, someone would have had to place a long ladder outside, climb up and remain unnoticed by pupils, teachers and the photographer. The school's marketing manager is attempting to contact any former pupil who appeared in the back row of this photograph. *Reddish Community News*, Oct 2005.

## WHAT ON EARTH...?

An artefact returned to a Norwegian museum by a contrite thief has officials puzzled. The French-speaking thief sent the artefact back to the Norwegian embassy in Paris along with a letter explaining he had stolen it 42 years ago. He described it as a "Sami fleshscraper", Sami being the indigenous people of Lapland. It is carved wood, nearly 4in (10cm) long, and fitted in an iron base. The museum curators have no idea if it really is a scraper or a hoax.

"For 40 years I have enjoyed this rare tool in my home," the anonymous thief

## MIGHTY DUST CLOUD

This dust cloud (above) in the Australian Outback, resembling Uluru (Ayer's Rock), was photographed by Karen Brook, 20, outside the Queensland town of Birdsville. It was reckoned to be a mile (1.6km) wide, a quarter of a mile (400m) high and stretching back for three miles (4.8km). When the cloud hit town it was, said Ms Brook, no worse than "being struck with a feather duster". It took about half an hour to pass. "People who were brave enough to stand out in it... were covered from head to toe in fine red dust." A short while later, rain arrived, turning the dust to mud. *D.Mail*, 28 Jan 2006. PHOTO: NEWSPIX / KAREN BROOK



wrote in a typed letter postmarked Biarritz. "In my old age I have now decided to return it to the descendants of those who imagined it, built it and used it." The letter was signed by "an ex-thief who was less a thief and more a man passionate about authenticity and real life." *Shropshire Star*, 10 Jan; *Independent on Sunday*, 15 Jan 2006.

## WHEN ELKS GO BAD

Sometime around 5 November 2005, a female elk and her calf loitered outside a retirement home in Sibbhult, Sweden, after devouring large numbers of fermented apples. Police managed to scare them off, but the tipsy animals returned for more of the tempting fruit. This time they were drunk and aggressive, forcing police to send for a hunter and his dog to make them leave. That's the story put out by Associated Press; Luke Harding's report from Berlin, published in the *Guardian*, says "a drunken party of elks" attacked the old people's home "in the town of Östra Göinge, near Malmö [...] Police with dogs failed to scare them off, and the animals only ran away after hunters with guns arrived on the scene."

Whatever the exact sequence of events in November, elks (or moose as they are known

in Canada) regularly cause trouble. Drunken elk jump through living room windows and smash up furniture, bellyflop into empty swimming pools and violently attack people. Traffic accidents with elk are commonplace; for instance, 4,204 of them were killed on Swedish roads in 2003. A female elk recently attacked three joggers in Norway, and another stole a bicycle from a garden in May 2004.

Björn and Monica Helamb, of Vuoggatjålme in Sweden, said the elk in question (below) had regularly visited their garden to eat their roses over the last decade. Fed up with the destruction, the couple placed a bicycle in front of the flowers as their first line of defence. However, the elk leaned through the bike frame and chomped away as usual. She then wandered off with the bike hanging around her neck. The couple found it about

500 metres (1,640ft) from the house, bent and damaged beyond repair.

One night last October, Anne Marie and Lars Johan Tveten heard a noise outside in the garden of their farm in the Norwegian coastal town of Bamble. When they awoke the next morning, two elk were staring at the couple just a few feet from their bedroom window. They then turned and wandered off into the forest. The noise in the night was the two elk smashing the Tvetens' elk statue. The 200kg (440lb) artwork was lying broken in several pieces on some stone steps leading down to their cellar. "We don't know why they ruined the statue," said Mrs Tveten. "Previously, they've only been interested in our apple and pear trees." *BBC News*, 24 May 2004; *Aftenposten* (Norway), 17 Oct; [AFP] 7 Nov; [AP] *Guardian*, 11 Nov 2005.





## SIDELINES...

### DOUBLE DUTCH

Two babies named Sofie Bijster were born on 17 November in the Kennemer hospital in Haarlem, Holland. Both fathers were called Dennis – one from Haarlem and one from Spaarndam. The namesakes knew of each other, but not that their wives were pregnant. Both babies were two weeks overdue. The name Sofie had been chosen by their respective fathers. [ANP] 21 Nov 2005.

### PUNS RULE OK

John Hardie's Chichester plumbing company, All Cisterns Go, won the title of Britain's Best Business Name 2005. The runners-up included car valet firm Rub 'n' Hoods, clothes hire business 20th Century Frox, Indian restaurant Balti Towers, Bangers & Flash Fireworks and a garage called Tyred & Exhausted. *Shropshire Star*, 19 Dec 2005.

### HAWK ATTACK

Timothy Mills, nine, was cycling down a lane in Marton, Blackpool, on 21 January when a Harris hawk swooped on his head and sank its talons into his face. He grappled to free himself from its grip and dived clear as the bird flew off. He was left with severe cuts and his shirt was covered in blood. The hawk had been let out for exercise by its owner, who lived nearby. *D.Mail*, 25 Jan 2006.

# Holy signs and miracles

Weeping statues, hurricane leaves Jesus image, Lourdes cure



EMPICS / AP / RICH PEDRONCELLI

### MARY BLEEDS AGAIN

Dozens of the faithful, carrying rosary beads and cameras, have been visiting a white concrete statue of the Virgin Mary outside the Vietnamese Catholic Martyrs Church on the outskirts of Sacramento, California, after claims that it had been weeping tears of blood. On 9 November, the parish priest spotted a stain on the statue's face and wiped it away. Before Mass on 20 November, people again noticed a reddish substance near the eyes, according to Ky Truong, 56, a parishioner. In the week following, Trong was

On 26 November, people sat silently praying on fold-up chairs while others sang hymns or hugged their children. An elderly woman in a wheelchair wept. A red trail could be seen from the side of the statue's left eye to about halfway down the robe of concrete. On a clear and unseasonably warm Christmas Eve, dozens were still coming to see what they believed to be a miracle. By the New Year, heavy rains had rendered the 'tears' a mere smudge on the left side of the face, but the pilgrims kept coming. *San Antonio (TX) Express-News*, 27 Nov 2005; *Economist*, 7 Jan 2006.

Around the same time as the Sacramento statue started shedding bloody tears, another statue of the Virgin Mary in front of Notre Dame Cathedral in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, also started 'crying', according to a personal report from a Birmingham man. He didn't say if the tears were made of water, blood, or some other liquid. (private email, 14 Nov 2005).

### JESUS VERSUS WILMA

In Mexico, a shrine was set up beside a plant pot on the Caribbean island of Cozumel after an image said to depict Jesus appeared on it following Hurricane Wilma in October. A receptionist at the Occidental Grand resort noticed the image on the enamelled terra cotta pot as guests emerged from a storm shelter after huddling for three days while Wilma hurled rain and debris. Local media called the image a miracle and connected it with the fact that none of the 200 guests suffered injury during the storm, which tore up other beach resorts on Cozumel. The Occidental Grand was the only hotel not to evacuate its guests before the hurricane, as it had a shelter stocked with three months' worth of food and water for 300 people. *Irish Examiner*, 22 Nov 2005. For Our Lady of the Underpass in Chicago, see FT201:10.

## A red trail came from the side of the left eye

at the church day and night, so emotional he was unable to work at his job as a general contractor. "There's a big event in the future – earthquake, flood, a disease," he said. "We're very sad."



LIVERPOOL DAILY POST & ECHO / SUZIE JAMES

### LOURDES MIRACLES

An Italian woman's recovery from a serious illness after a pilgrimage to Lourdes in 1952 has officially become the 67th "miracle cure" attributed to the sanctuary in south-western France, Christianity's most visited place of pilgrimage after Rome.

Anna Santaniello, now aged 94, was suffering from Bouillaud's disease, a rheumatic condition

that causes trouble with speaking and walking, as well as acute asthma attacks, cyanosis of the face and lips, and swelling of the legs. The same illness had killed one of her brothers and a sister. She travelled to Lourdes after being diagnosed with a diseased heart.

"I arrived there on a stretcher because I was unable to walk," she said. "The sisters submerged me in the spring. The water was icy cold but I

immediately felt something hot explode in my chest, as if life were being restored to me. After a few minutes I was able to get up by myself. I refused the help of the stretcher carriers, telling them to help the other sick people because I could now manage on my own." A heart specialist in Italy declared her perfectly healthy, and in 1961 the international medical committee at Lourdes described

her case as "extraordinary". (Sydney) *D.Telegraph*, 16 Nov 2005.

Thomas Robinson, nine (left, with his mother), a pupil at Our Lady Queen of Peace primary school in Thornton, Lancashire, was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumour after two mini-strokes in March 2005. An operation to remove it went well and he underwent radiotherapy to blast any remaining cancer cells; but six weeks later new brain scans showed the cancer had returned. Specialists said the golfball-sized growth gave him little chance of survival.

Thomas's mother Haley and his grandmother Veronica took him on a two-day trip to Lourdes. A few days after their return from France, doctors at Alder Hey hospital carried out a last-ditch operation – but found no trace of the tumour. They were unable to explain his recovery. "It is unlikely he will ever get the use of his left arm back after the strokes, but he is walking again," said his mother. "Having him home is the best bit. Maybe next year he will be able to go back to school." *Liverpool Echo*, 28 Dec 2005.



CRAWLEY OBSERVER

The name of Allah inscribed in aubergine seeds has regularly come to our attention in Fortean Towers since 1990 [See FT55:4-5], but the one shown here is a particularly fine example. It was discovered on 8 June 2005 by Muhammad Asraf Hansrot, 25, of Langley Green, West Sussex. His wife Mahzabin had cut open the vegetable while preparing lunch. *Crawley (West Sussex) Observer*, 15 June 2005.

## SIDELINES...

### INVISIBLE MAN

Ye Xiangting of China's Henan province went to get a new identity card. He sat for the camera but failed to appear in the photograph. The equipment was checked and another photo taken; but still no Ye Xiangting. Then he was photographed with others; the others showed up, but he didn't. There have, apparently, been two similar cases in the past. *Independent on Sunday*, 22 Jan 2006.

### FISH ASSAULT

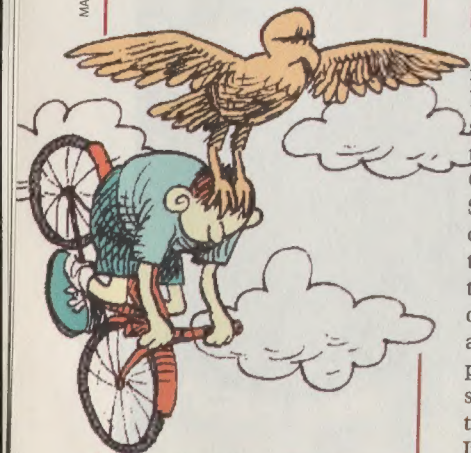
Alan Bennie, 20, was walking through Zetland Park in Grangemouth, Stirlingshire, at 8.30pm one evening in May 2005 when he was accosted by David Evans, 22, carrying a large fish. "Do you want to kiss my fish?" asked the latter. Bennie made no reply and walked on. "You answer me next time I ask you to kiss a fish," said Evans, and slapped him round the face with the fish. Bennie encountered some policemen, who asked him why he had fish guts and scales sticking to his face, after which they arrested Evans. Evans was later jailed for six months. *Edinburgh Eve. News*, 22 Nov 2005.

### AMPUTATION URGED

Oscar Goodman, mayor of Las Vegas, suggested on a local television programme in November that those who deface roads with graffiti should have their thumbs cut off on television. He also supported the revival of whipping for naughty children. [AP] 5 Nov 2005.

### LEAVING HIM COLD

Some years ago, a Russian called Vitaly Matyukhin suffered severe heatstroke and was left with "heat exchange disorder", which means that his body can't properly regulate its temperature. As exposure to anything warmer than 5°C (40°F) could be fatal, he moved to Siberia, only went out on winter nights, and converted his flat into a fridge. His wife then sought a divorce. *Independent on Sunday*, 9 Oct 2005.







## SIDELINES...

### LONG-DISTANCE LUNCH

Birdwatchers on the Shetlands were delighted when they found a veery, a type of small American thrush, which had been blown across the Atlantic. It was only the fifth recorded veery in the UK. The yellow bird was trapped and ringed at Northdale, Unst. But within hours, the veery was pounced on and killed by a local cat. *Daily Record*, 4 Oct 2005.

### FIRED FOR SEEING GHOSTS

On 11 September, security guard Wade Gallegos alerted his supervisor at Neighborhood Patrol in Des Moines, Iowa, that he was seeing ghosts. The supervisor arrived at the scene and Gallegos showed him where the ghosts were still apparently standing. However, he failed to see anything and fired Gallegos. The company found no signs of drug or alcohol use, but challenged Gallegos's application for unemployment benefits, arguing that he was guilty of misconduct. He appealed in November and had the ruling overturned. [AP] 17 Nov 2005.

### DIVINE WARDROBE

Pilgrims flocked to Valeriu Junie's flat in Drobeta, Romania, on 1 November after reports that images of Jesus, St Peter and St Paul had appeared on a wardrobe there. Mr Junie, 66, claimed to see the figures regularly. "Jesus was there," said a priest, Vasile Nuhaiu. "It's a miracle." *Metro*, 2 Nov 2005.

MARTIN ROSS



# Dead? Not so much

More people return to bereaved and disbelieving families



ALEC SEVERIN

Raju Raghuvanshi, an Indian man, was sent to prison in October 2005 for a minor tax infraction. He fell ill with a stomach ailment and was transferred to a prison hospital in another district. He recovered, but by then a distant relative had told his family and friends in Katra, his home village in the central state of Madhya Pradesh, about 400 miles (640km) from Delhi, that he had died and his body had been cremated because no one had retrieved it. When he returned to Katra in January, he was greeted by shouts of "Help! Ghost!" His family ostracised him and

## Raju was greeted by shouts of 'Help! Ghost!'

neighbours bolted their doors. "My family thinks I am dead," said the bewildered man. "They will not permit me to enter my home because they think I am a

ghost." The best proof he had – that his feet were still properly attached, not turned backward as ghosts' feet were thought to be – was dismissed. He said his brothers even "argued that they had completed all religious death ceremonies", such as shaving their heads, and that he should not have come back to haunt them. He then enlisted the help of the police to try to convince village elders and his relatives he was alive – but it was unclear what would be acceptable proof. [R] *D.Telegraph*, 17 Jan 2006.

When Angela Saraiva, 20, disappeared after a New Year's Eve party in Salta, Argentina, her parents were distraught. When a body was found, her grieving mother went to the morgue and identified her beloved Angela. The family decided on a quick burial and carried the coffin through the streets in a melancholy cavalcade. Ms Saraiva then joined the procession, wondering who had died. Her startled mother said her resemblance to the girl in the morgue was uncanny. *Independent*, 14 Jan 2006.

For further misidentifications of the dead, see FT196:9, which cross-refers to 12 earlier round-ups.

Premature death reports can happen to cats, too. Sports instructor Will Massingale of Bude in Cornwall was burying what he thought was his cat Timmy after he was killed by a car outside his home; but when Timmy wandered into the garden he realised the dead cat was a look-alike belonging to a neighbour. *Sun*, 25 July 2005.

# A long, slow journey

Iranian woman drags all her belongings to rejoin her family



SOUTH WALES ARGUS

TREKKER: Mahin pictured with her cat and other chattels on 7 November 2005 near Thornbury, on the English side of the River Severn.

Iranian-born Mahin arrived in South Wales at the time of the Iranian Revolution in 1979. Over two years ago, she set out to walk from Cardiff to London to visit her two grown-up children, dragging all her possessions in large white plastic sacks and a chest of drawers, with her cat tied to her waist with string, and moving at a rate of 15 feet (4.6m) a day. The fiercely independent Mahin arrived in Newport last summer. Despite generally spurning offers of help, in November she let Laura Buchanan-Smith, a Newport councillor, take her across the Severn Bridge and drop her off in South Gloucestershire. After a brief stay during which Mahin claimed to have been attacked by thugs who stole her cat (the cat had just wandered off and reappeared the next day), Mrs Buchanan-Smith took her on to Windsor, where she had a friend who could keep an eye on her. Just after Christmas,

## Mahin was moving at a rate of 15 feet a day

Mahin was taken into hospital for assessment, but her problems apparently stem chiefly from stubbornness rather than mental illness, and she moved to a hostel in Bedfordshire. Her pet was put in a cattery where she could visit it. Despite offers of housing and benefits, Mahin decided to leave the hostel and resume her epic journey. Worryingly, no one has reported seeing her since she left. *South Wales Argus*, 1 Sept + 30 Dec 2005, 14 Jan 2006; *Gazette* (Gloucestershire), 2 Dec 2005. Thanks to Laura Buchanan-Smith.

Stephen Gough, known as "the naked Rambler", has completed his second trek from Land's End to John O'Groats. With his partner, Melanie Roberts, he reached the north coast of Caithness on 20 February. He began his 874-mile (1,407km) trip in June 2005 and was repeatedly arrested and jailed. He had two spells in Edinburgh's Saughton prison, two weeks and two months, and was immediately re-arrested each time on leaving prison, his nakedness deemed a breach of the peace. The ex-marine, from Eastleigh in Hampshire, said he wanted to challenge public attitudes to nudity. He celebrated his success by putting his clothes on. "It's nice to get warmed up again," he said from a John O'Groats café. "It's been pretty cold and the locals have been coming up to us offering us whisky and all sorts." He first made the trek in January 2004, and has not ruled out doing it again. *BBC News*, 21 Feb 2006.

## SIDELINES...

### BLOODSUCKERS

Chheng Chhorn, 46, and Srun Yoeung, 37, noodle-sellers in Kampong Cham province, Cambodia, attacked their 12-year-old daughter before dawn on 6 October 2005, biting off her thumbnails and a small part of her nose to drink her blood. Neighbours rescued the girl after hearing her screams and took her to hospital. Meanwhile, relatives took the girl's parents to a black magic healer to chase away the evil spirit that was believed to have possessed them. [AP] 9 Oct 2005.

### SPITTING IMAGE

Japanese high school girls needing extra cash are meeting "spit enthusiasts" on the streets of Tokyo and at city parlours to offer their saliva for sale. At a parlour in Shibuya district, a client behind a two-way mirror can watch three girls in school uniforms chatting. He chooses his favourite, who fills a bottle with her spit, for which he pays 12,000 yen. This parlour charges 5,000 yen for underwear and 8,000 yen for urine. (*Malaysia*) *Star*, 28 Oct 2005.

### LOST LIONS

Five hungry lions were found in an abandoned circus truck in the middle of the interstate road between Uberaba and Conceição das Alagoas in Brazil. While an attempt was made to trace the owners, the lions were being kept at a police station, where they were each eating 10kg (22lb) of meat a day. *Irish Examiner*, 29 Dec 2005.

### ACCIDENTS WILL HAPPEN

Linda Riley, an insurance underwriter from Newburgh, Fife, has won compensation from Norwich Union after she tripped and fell over a pile of accident claim forms. She said she had suffered pain and loss of earnings since falling while at work in the company's Perth office three years ago. She reached an undisclosed out-of-court settlement after claiming £5,000. *BBC News*, 25 Jan 2006.



## SIDELINES...

### ROUGH DOLPHIN

A 41-year-old German tourist was hospitalised with abdominal injuries on 4 September, following a collision with a female bottle-nosed dolphin off the Irish coast near the village on Miltown Malbay in Co. Clare. The dolphin had been attracting crowds off the north Clare coast at Fanore for the past four summers. It had rammed swimmers at speed, butted them in the ribs and face and pinned them to the seabed. *Irish Times*, 6 Sept 2005.

### HE MUST BE MAD

At 8.15pm on 29 August 2005, Andi Ye, 37, took a dip in the sea at Whitby, wearing a sweatshirt and tracksuit bottoms. A passer-by saw him waist-deep in the sea, assumed he was committing suicide, and called the police, who followed him back to his parents' house. He was told that if he didn't agree to a medical examination, he would be sectioned under the Mental Health Act and confined to a police cell. It was not until his father arrived home that the police decided to give up. *Whitby Gazette*, 2 Sept 2005.

### EXPRESS DELIVERY

Alesha Johnson, four, was among 25 children at a Heysham nursery who each launched a message (with return address) in a bottle into Morecambe Bay, Lancashire, in July 2005. Six months later, and 9,000 miles (14,500km) away, Alesha's bottle washed up in a boatyard near Perth, Western Australia, where it was found by a 10-year-old boy. An oceanographer said she had never heard of a bottle travelling so far so quickly. *Sun, Shropshire Star*, 19 Jan 2006.



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### HEART ATTACK GIVES SIGHT

Joyce Urch, 74, a mother of five from Coventry, lost her sight in 1979, after being diagnosed with glaucoma. More than a quarter of a century later, she was admitted to the city's Walsgrave Hospital with chest pains. A few days later, she suffered cardiac arrest and was not expected to live. However, she awoke from a coma – and left doctors and her husband Eric, 77, astounded when she exclaimed: "I can see! I can see!"

She has now seen her three great-grandchildren for the first time and on 14 January celebrated her golden wedding anniversary. Dr Martin Been, her consultant cardiologist, couldn't explain her sight returning. Ian Murdoch, a consultant at Moorfields Eye Hospital in London, said the blindness might have been caused not by the glaucoma but by cataracts, where the lens of the eye becomes cloudy. "The heart attack itself or the treatment she received as a result could have put pressure on her eyes, causing the cataract to drop away to the back. But if this were the case, I would expect Mrs Urch to have regained only unfocused sight, such as being able to perceive between light and dark." *D.Mail*, 20 Jan 2006.

### SKI LIFT RESTORES HEARING

Derek Glover, 72, (above) a father of three from Bourne, Lincolnshire, suddenly regained his hearing on a ski lift at Cavalese, 7,000ft (2,130m) up in the Italian Dolomites, in mid-January. His hearing was first damaged while on National Service 50 years ago, which saw him spend months on firing ranges with the Lincolnshire Regiment, and it gradually worsened until he had to have a hearing aid fitted 15 years ago. Then it got worse again and he had to have hearing aids in both ears.

"I'd been skiing all morning and we'd decided we'd had enough so I was coming down in the cable car with my daughter



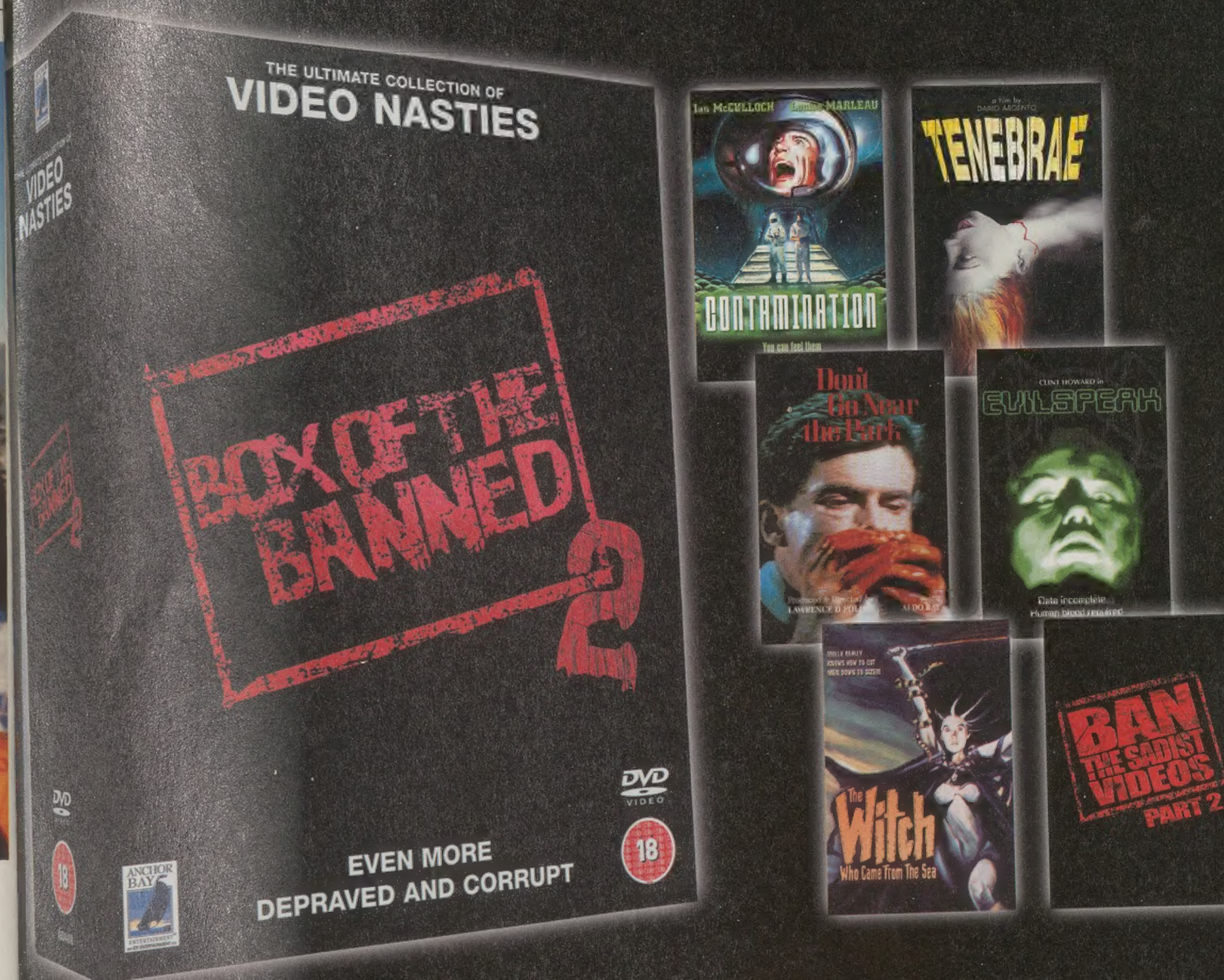
## Joyce awoke from a coma and could see again

and son-in-law," he said. "We were at about 7,000ft when I heard a very loud pop – and all of a sudden an incredible wave of sound came rushing into my ears. I could suddenly hear [my daughter] as clear as a bell. I was aware of the difference straight away... I can blame the Army for making me

deaf, but at the same time they also taught me how to ski – so I suppose I can thank them for helping cure me."

Doctors have been unable to explain what happened; damage to the inner ear from loud noise such as gunfire is generally supposed to be irreversible. One expert suggested that his deafness had been caused by a mismatch in pressure in his middle or outer ear, which fixed itself when his ears popped; but a spokesman for Deafness Research UK said such a case was "virtually unheard of" (presumably no pun intended). *D.Mail*, *BBC News*, 31 Jan 2006. For further "miraculous" restorations of sight and hearing, see *FT* 53:28-30, 144:12.

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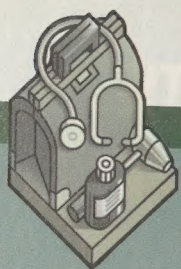
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## medical bag

Fortean Times's regular round-up of stories from the very edges of the stethoscope's reach.

### Champion hair

Hair typically grows to a maximum length of 5ft (1.5m), but Dae Yu Quin, 41, a Chinese woman from Shanghai, has hair 14ft 9in (4.5m) long. She has not cut it since she was forced to shave her head as a teenager because of a scalp disease. Now, 26 years later, it takes half a day to wash and dry. L'Oreal's Chinese office tracked her down when her extraordinary tresses featured in a Shanghai newspaper, and now the firm is studying some of her hair.

Miss Dae claims that her secret is to keep her hair in a turban, so that it is not exposed to ultraviolet light or pollution. Although she regularly washes it, she doesn't use a dryer. Women with the longest hair in the world tend to be from China and India, which may be linked with their genetic make-up. A few of Miss Dae's hairs, around 6ft 6in (2m) long, from her hairbrush have been put under an electron microscope at L'Oreal's Hair Metrology Laboratory to examine their structure, from the cuticle on the outside, consisting of scales, to the cortex and then, in the middle, the medulla.

Near the root her hair has scales as normal, but some damage. In the middle, at around 3ft (90cm), the scales remain, which is unusual for hair of this length, but they show some signs of damage. At the tip, the hair is smooth and free of scales. The outer cuticle of the hair is missing and the cortex is exposed – typical of split ends. The study reveals that the growth rate for her hair is average for a Chinese person. She has now agreed to give L'Oreal some of her longest hairs, but has refused to provide a sample of her scalp to study the roots. *D.Telegraph, 16 Nov 2005.*

### Beating HIV?

A 25-year-old sandwich-maker from Ayrshire claims to be the first person in the world with an immune system capable of shaking off the

## It takes half a day for Dae Yu Quin to wash and dry her hair

HIV virus. Andrew Stimpson, who now lives in London, was twice tested positive for HIV by the Chelsea Westminster Healthcare NHS Trust in August 2002, after having apparently contracted the virus from his HIV-positive boyfriend, Juan Gomez, 44. Stimpson was not on any medication for HIV, but he did begin taking vitamins and other dietary supplements and so impressed doctors with his good health that he was offered further tests 14 months later. These came back negative.

Stimpson then began legal action against the trust, believing a mistake had been made; the trust countered that both sets of tests had been accurate, and the NHS Litigation Authority told him that the "fact that you have recovered from a positive antibody result is exceptional and medically remarkable". Rather than agreeing to further tests at this point, or allowing time for rigorous scientific study, Stimpson proceeded to sell his story to the *News of the World* and the *Mail on Sunday*. "I can't help wondering if I hold the cure for AIDS," he said. "It is scary and confusing, but makes me feel very special."



### Hirsute child

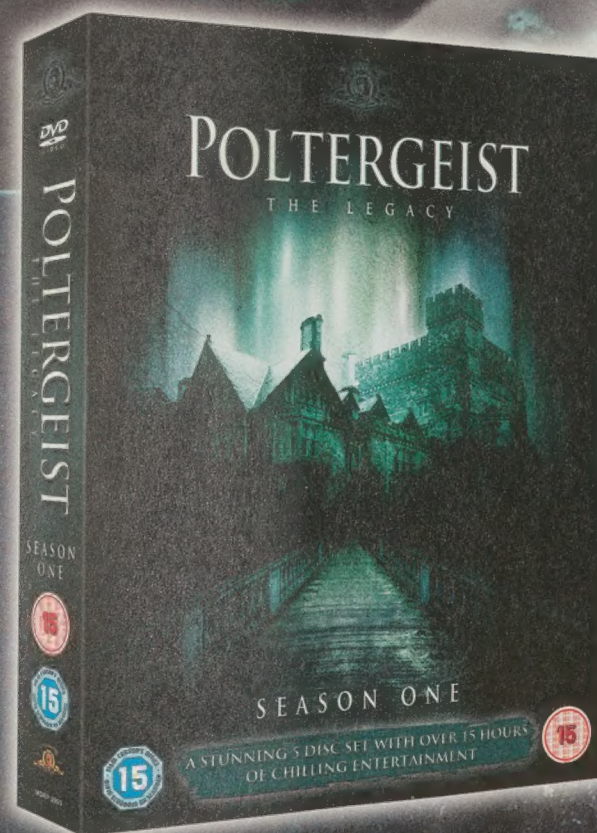
Nong Nat, a four-year-old Thai girl, suffers from Ambras Syndrome or congenital hypertrichosis lanuginosa, which causes hair to grow all over the body. There are said to be around 40 sufferers of such all-over hairiness alive today. The most famous are Yu Zhenhuan ("Shock the Universe"), 26, in China and the Gomez brothers in Mexico [FT30:45-47, 56:32, 59:21, 163:14, 190:23]. The condition is untreatable except by very expensive electrolysis. *Sun, D.Express, 30 Oct 2004.*

# POLTERGEIST

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# Mythconceptions

by Mat Coward

## 95. TOO COLD TO SNOW



### The myth

Sometimes, during cold weather, it snows – but other times, it's just so cold that it's too cold even for snow.

### The "truth"

Anyone who's lived in a country where it snows in winter will recognise the feeling behind this popular piece of folk meteorology: there are days when the cold is so intense, you have the sense that even the snow is too frozen to fall. "It's been trying to snow all day," people will say, "but it's just too cold." Professional meteorologists, however, say that nowhere on Earth can ever be literally too cold for snow; it can and does snow at extremely low temperatures. But it is true that snow is less common and less plentiful once ground level air temperatures get much below zero (the figure given varies), mainly because of a lack of water vapour in the cold air. Even then, significant snowfall can occur under certain circumstances, such as up a mountain, or over a source of heat or body of water. Snow is certainly not unknown, for instance, at the frozen Poles. Only at absolute zero (−459°F or −273°C), say the experts, would snow become impossible. Along with everything else.

### Sources

[www.komotv.com/asksteve/story.asp?ID=29207](http://www.komotv.com/asksteve/story.asp?ID=29207);  
[www.theweatherprediction.com/habyhints/222/](http://www.theweatherprediction.com/habyhints/222/);  
<http://nsidc.org/snow/faq.html>;  
[www.sciam.com/askexpert](http://www.sciam.com/askexpert)

### Disclaimer

If you're reading this in the Arctic, still fed up about that build-your-own snowman kit you got for Christmas, feel free to argue with this column via the letters page.

### Mythchaser

By definition, all FT readers lead strange inner lives – none more so, surely, than the one who wants me to find out whether it's true "that there were



Victorian sweat-shops that specialised in making fake raspberry pips for ersatz jam". Can this be true – and if so, what on Earth were the pips made of?



## Puppy love

Boobah, an orphan burrowing owl (left and far left), has made friends with Hazel, a German shepherd and at the time of the report was spending his entire time with the bitch and her two-week old pups Snowflake and Tammy. They were parted only at night when Boobah was returned to his cage. The creatures belong to Stuart Ward, 46, a tree surgeon from Shrewsbury, who is licensed to breed birds of prey. His wife Caroline, 33, said bird and bitch first met while two-year-old Hazel was feeding her pups. "Boobah hopped over to her and I was expecting her to growl or bark at him to shoo him away," she said. "But she let him come right up close and he even tried to suckle milk from her. We regularly see Boobah cling onto Hazel's back as she takes him for walks around the house." *D.Mail, Metro, 14 Nov 2005.*

**BELOW:** Monty, a 15-year-old gelding, takes his friend Tyler, a black labrador, for daily mile-long trot across the fields around Cotehill, Carlisle. The two have been firm friends since they were introduced when Tyler was a puppy, two year ago. *D.Mail 16 July 2005.*







## KONSPIRACY KORNER

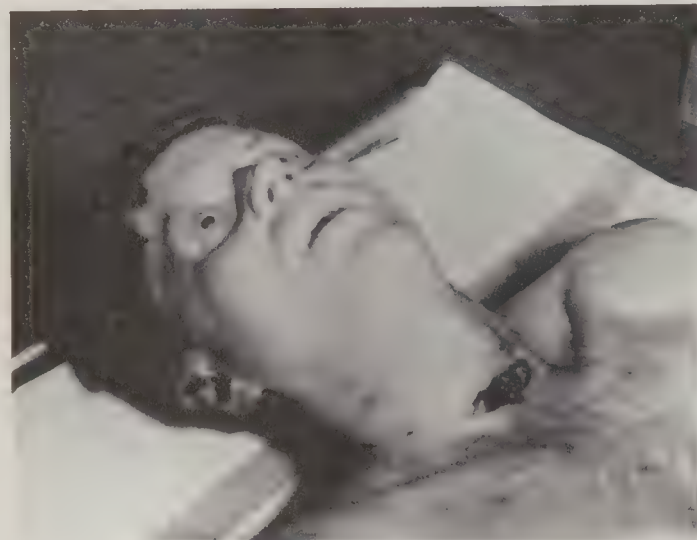
ROBIN RAMSAY, EDITOR OF LOBSTER, REPORTS FROM THE BUNKER

The 9/11 debate continues to widen and deepen out there in conspiracy cyberspace. There are now nearly 11 million Google "hits" for "9-11 conspiracy", and the first critical academic group has announced itself at [www.scholarsfor911truth.org](http://www.scholarsfor911truth.org) around a growing consensus that the official report on 9/11 was a crude whitewash and the WTC buildings were brought down by controlled demolition and not by the hijacked planes.

But there is still plenty of life in the granddaddy of American conspiracy research subjects, President Kennedy's assassination. In a replay of the disinformation that circulated immediately after the shooting, a current TV documentary first shown in Germany argues that Lee Harvey Oswald shot Kennedy for the Castro regime in Cuba, in retaliation for the CIA's numerous attempts on Castro's life. Given that one of the few things in the whole affair on which most in the JFK research community are agreed is that Oswald shot no one, this is hardly likely to be taken too seriously in that arena – but, to judge from early reactions, the mainstream media is going to lap it up. (See Kate Connolly, "Did the Cubans Assassinate Kennedy", *D.Telegraph* 4 Jan 2006.)

More importantly, a startlingly clear, "stabilised" version of the Zapruder film of the Kennedy assassination, which focuses on the passengers in the JFK limo, is now at [www.assassinationscience.com/johncostella/jfk/intro/fast.html](http://www.assassinationscience.com/johncostella/jfk/intro/fast.html).

The film's creator, John Costella, uses this "stabilised" version to show that the Zapruder film of the shooting has been doctored in places. (You can follow his analysis at the URL above – and pretty convincing it is, too.) The film shows the big hole blasted out of Kennedy's right forehead and the big flap of skull, seen in some of the official autopsy pictures. The medical mystery begins here, for neither the official autopsy report ([www.thesmokinggun.com/jfk2/protocol2.html](http://www.thesmokinggun.com/jfk2/protocol2.html)) nor the doctors in Dallas who treated him, noticed that forehead wound. The doctors saw a fist-sized hole in the back of his head, and the autopsy report describes a much bigger hole spreading up towards the centre of his head.



## Costella shows that the Zapruder film was doctored

The collection of autopsy pictures (example above) at [www.jfkclancer.com/aphotos.html](http://www.jfkclancer.com/aphotos.html) shows JFK both with and without the forehead wound. Given that neither autopsy nor doctors reported it, the forehead wound pictures must be the fakes; and thus, so is the Zapruder film, which shows the forehead wound occurring. But are the non-forehead wound pictures genuine? We can't be sure. The technicians who photographed the autopsy say they are faked.

An alternative has been proposed: the autopsy pictures are genuine but they don't show JFK's head. Also shot in the head that day in Dallas was officer Tippit of the Dallas police. An American named Robert Morningstar (who tells us, inter alia, that in 1997 he was "elected Presider" (sic) of the Ancient Druid Order of England in a Druid ceremony at Stonehenge linking him spiritually to the Arthurian legacy) came up with the Tippit idea, and at [www.jfkresearch.com/](http://www.jfkresearch.com/)

[morningstar/morningstar3.htm](http://morningstar/morningstar3.htm) he displays the startling physical similarities between JFK and Tippit.

Morningstar's argument isn't the clearest, but he shows that Tippit's wounds were similar to those described in the JFK autopsy. And so part of the mystery seems to dissolve: the non-faked autopsy pictures are of Tippit. (Photographs of Tippit's wounds and his autopsy report can be found in Dale Myers, *With Malice: Lee Harvey Oswald and the murder of Officer J.D. Tippit*, Michigan, 1998.) Confused? You might well be. But don't feel bad – so is everyone else! The medical evidence is an impenetrable thicket of dubious autopsy

pictures and faked X-rays through which no one has yet cut an intelligible trail.

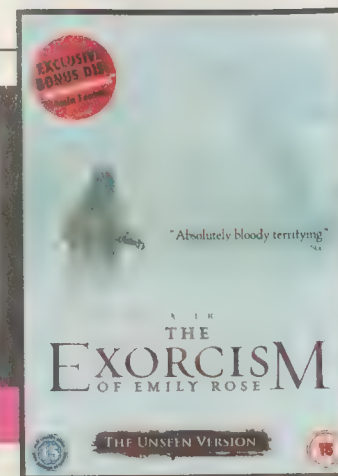
So: two "JFK" autopsies, perhaps. Why not? After all, we also seem to have two "Oswalds". The idea has been around since the mid-1960s that someone had been impersonating Oswald in the months before the assassination – FBI head J. Edgar Hoover had written a memo to that effect prior to the assassination. Subsequent elaborations on the theme had a fake "Oswald" returning from the Soviet Union (in a Soviet operation), and the two "Oswalds" being switched just before his "defection" (in an American one).

In a series of lectures and finally a 1,000-page, barely edited, self-published book, *Harvey and Lee* (2003, ISBN 2003096313), John Armstrong seems to show that there were two "Oswalds" in the 1950s, two "Oswalds" in the Marines, and two post-defection "Oswalds". One was the Russian-speaking, apparently pro-Castro, lefty activist; the other a gung-ho, anti-Castro figure involved in arms dealing, who was talking of killing JFK in the weeks before the assassination. Armstrong has apparently uncovered an incredibly complex, long-range intelligence operation by the Americans to get a Marine "defector" into the Soviet Union who, unbeknown to the Soviet authorities, spoke Russian. (Start the Armstrong trail at <http://home.wi.rr.com/harveyandlee/>).

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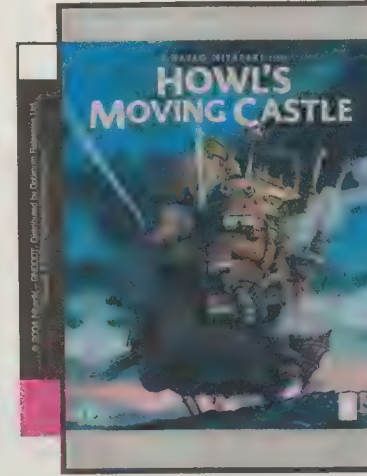
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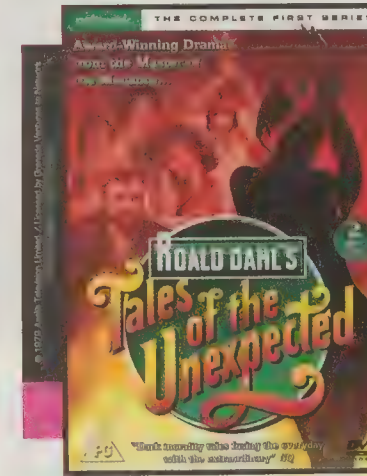


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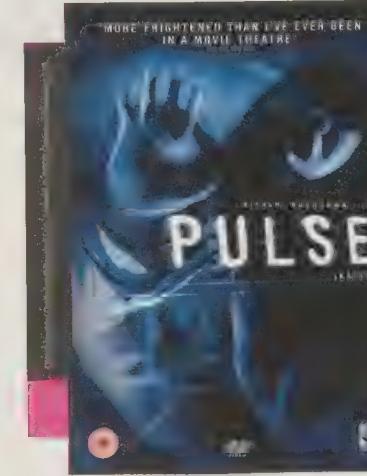


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# Rodents' revenge...

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## PARABLE OF THE MOUSE

The original story of a mouse that got its own back was perfect as a newspaper filler and rapidly spread around the world. Luciano Mares, 81, of Fort Sumner, New Mexico, said he caught a mouse in a glue trap inside his house on 7 January and threw it on a pile of leaves he was burning in his garden. Its fur ablaze, the pesky rodent then scuttled back to the house and ran beneath a window, setting curtains on fire. The ensuing blaze (right), which took the efforts of 13 firemen over three hours to extinguish, destroyed the wooden house and its entire contents. "I've seen numerous house fires," said village fire chief Jim Lyssy, "but nothing as unique as this one." In the preceding weeks, unseasonably dry and windy conditions had led to several major blazes in New Mexico, which destroyed 10 houses and charred more than 53,000 acres (21,500 ha) of land.

At the time of the report, Mr Mares was staying in a motel. In an interview for an Albuquerque television station two days later, he denied the mouse story, saying: "It's really humorous more than anything else." We're glad he has retained his sense of humour after losing all his possessions, which were uninsured. He said he had killed the mouse before throwing it on the bonfire, and the flames had probably reached his house because they were driven by high winds. The widely quoted fire chief, Capt. Lyssy, now said that the rumour probably started because there was "a little too much excitement". The following day, Mr Mares again blamed the mouse. Unable to separate mouse from glue trap, he had thrown both on the bonfire. The heat then melted the glue and the burning mouse ran back to the house, setting it on fire.

The urban legend website, Snopes, muses: "Perhaps the original version was true but Mr Mares, after being heavily criticized for throwing a living creature into a fire, chose to alter his story and claim the mouse was dead (thus making his initial story impossible), then decided the attention brought by the first version outweighed the criticism and switched back again. Or perhaps the first version was an

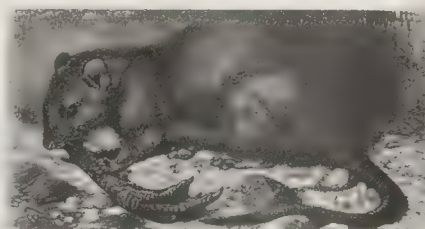


## CUNNING RAT

On 12 November 2004, James C Russell, a professor of biology at the University of Auckland in New Zealand and his team released a Norway rat called Razza on the 23.5-acre (9.5 ha) deserted island of Motuoropapa off New Zealand's north-east coast, to find out why the creatures are so difficult to eradicate. Invading rats on remote islands off New Zealand have been a recurring problem, playing havoc with the native fauna. They invaded the uninhabited and forested Noises Islands (Motuoropapa and Otata) at least six times between 1981 and 2002.

The scientists fitted Razza

with a radio-tracking collar and set out rodent detection and capture systems, including traps and tunnels baited with chocolate. When he continued to evade them, they stepped up the quality of treats used for bait, including peanut butter, fish and bird meat and traps "lubricated with pungent fish oil". Razza even outsmarted sniffer dogs. After 10 weeks on the island, he swam 400 meters (437 yards), the longest distance recorded for a rat across open sea, to the island of Otata. The scientists knew this because the radio collar had stopped working, a rat was sighted on Otata and DNA analysis of its droppings confirmed that it was Razza. After staying at large for 18 weeks, Razza was eventually captured in a trap baited with penguin meat. "Our findings confirm that eliminating a single invading rat is disproportionately difficult," Russell and his colleagues said in a report in *Nature*. Another male rat was then released in a follow-up experiment to see if Razza was unusually clever or lucky. *BBC News*, 19+22 Oct; [R] 22 Oct; *NY Times*, 3 Nov 2005.



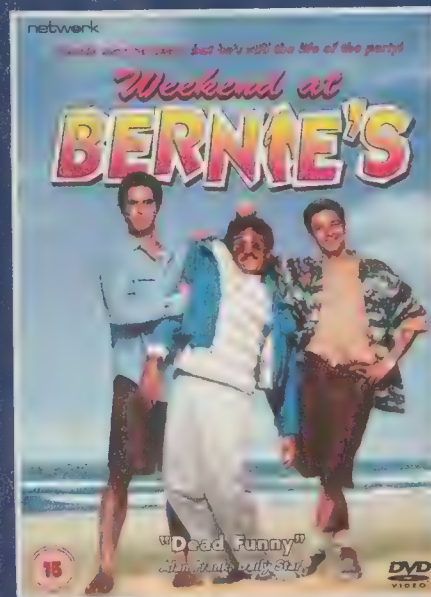
## The blaze took 13 firemen over three hours to extinguish

invented one, and after being ridiculed over it Mr Mares opted to tell the truth, then reverted to his fictional story because he liked the attention. Or maybe he doesn't even really know exactly what happened (i.e., the mouse ran out of the burning leaf pile and the house caught on fire, but the two events may not have been directly connected) and is improvising as he goes along."

There was a very similar report of a blazing rabbit setting fire to a groundsman's shed at Devizes Cricket Club, Wiltshire, in August 2004 [FT190:10]. Without doubt, animals do start fires. Last Boxing Day, for instance, firemen rushed to a smoking tenement building in Prestonfield, Edinburgh, to find that squirrels had chewed through an electrical cable, causing roof insulation to catch fire. *Sun*, 27 Dec 2005; [AP] 8 Jan; *WSBTv*, 10 Jan; (London) *Eve. Standard*, 11 Jan 2006.

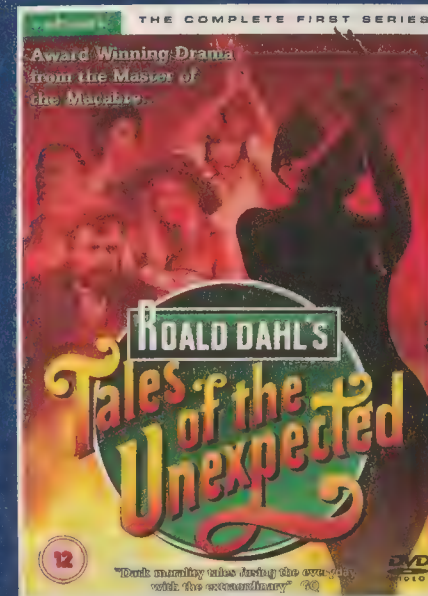
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# archæology

In the first of his regular round-ups, **PAUL DEVEREUX** discusses recent revelations unearthed from the peat bogs of Ireland.

## The long and short of Irish bog bodies



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ABOVE LEFT: The very tall man's torso and arms discovered at Croghan, Co. Offaly. ABOVE RIGHT: The male head and upper body found at Clonycavan, Co. Meath.

Two exceptionally well-preserved Iron Age bodies have been found in peat bogs 25 miles (40km) apart in the Irish Republic, the National Museum of Ireland has announced. One body found at Clonycavan, Co. Meath, was of a young man about 5ft 2in (157cm) tall, the other, found at Croghan, Co. Offaly, was a male also in his twenties, but this fellow had been of considerable stature – around 6ft 6in (198cm) tall with brawny, muscular arms. Both had been ritually slain.

"Clonycavan Man" was found in February 2003; peat-gathering machinery had destroyed parts of his corpse, but his head and other

upper body parts were intact. His eyes are wide open, with eyelashes and one shrunken eyeball still visible. His mouth gapes in a death scream, revealing his teeth. There is stubble on his upper lip and the remains of a goatee beard. Part of his head had been shaved, perhaps in preparation for the three axe-blows that had cracked open his skull. Finally, there is a knife-incision around his body where he was disembowelled. All very nasty, to be sure, but not so nasty as what happened to the other Iron Age guy, now dubbed "Oldcroghan Man".

In May 2003, a mechanical digger on desolate Croghan bog

disgorged the headless upper torso of a very large man. As with Clonycavan Man, the big fellow's flesh was still as soft as at the time of death, preserved by the anaerobic (oxygen-free) peat bog conditions, and his stomach, lungs and heart were intact. The pattern of wounds showed he raised an arm to defend himself from being stabbed in the lung. He had been crudely beheaded and at some point in his torture his mighty arms had been pierced and thin, twisted hazel branches passed through the wounds. The vicious treatment meted out to him also included being stabbed in the ribs and having his nipples sliced off.

All observers agree that the most striking features of Oldcroghan Man are his hands: the fingers are turned inwards towards the palms, the nails are present and the fingerprints and creases of the hand are as clear as on a living person.

Chemical analysis of Clonycavan Man's hair indicated that he had a primarily vegetarian diet, at least for some months prior to his death. The chemistry of Oldcroghan Man's fingernails revealed that he had more meat in his diet than did his shorter neighbour, suggesting that he died in the winter when vegetables were scarce. His stomach showed his last meal to

## Hair-Raising

Clonycavan Man (below) has a full head of hair apart from a shaved area. Reddish in colour, it sports a dramatic quiff resembling a modern "Mohican" hairstyle. It was kept in place by a hair gel comprising vegetable oil mixed with a pine resin that had come from southern France or Spain. It has been suggested that this "high hair" affectation was to help make the diminutive chap appear taller.



BBC

have been of buttermilk and cereal.

It is a staggering coincidence that two fleshed Iron Age bodies should be found within three months of each other and so close together. In all, just over 350 bog bodies have been found in Northern Europe, not all of them Iron Age and most just skeletons, flesh fragments, or bundles of cloth. In fact, some are known merely because of written records of the finds. Only about a dozen well preserved, "soft tissue" Iron Age bodies have been discovered, the most famous probably being "Tollund Man" from Denmark (he still had stubble on his chin and a noose around his neck) and "Lindow Man" discovered in Cheshire in 1984 [FT43:31]. These Irish examples rank among the finest of them all. Clonycavan Man has been carbon-dated to between 392 and 201 BC, and Oldcroghan Man to between 362 and 175 BC.

Announcement of the discovery of the bodies was delayed by two years in order to allow Irish and international experts to conduct investigations and analyses of them and the sites and to ensure their permanent preservation. Having featured in BBC TV's *Timewatch: The Bog Bodies* on 20 January 2006, they go on display at the National Museum of Ireland, Dublin, in May. [R] *D.Telegraph*, 7 Jan; *D.Mail*, 9 Jan; *New Scientist*, 14 Jan 2006; [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk); [www.PhyOrg.com](http://www.PhyOrg.com).

## RITUAL KILLINGS

Both the bog bodies had probably been aristocrats of some kind – Clonycavan Man had access to foreign unguents, while Oldcroghan Man's nails (right) are well manicured and his hands were unused to physical labour. Tied around his upper left arm was a band of plaited leather decorated with four metal clasps, the general type of adornment found on other bog bodies. Furthermore, the bodies' interment places are at the boundaries of ancient kingdoms. Ned Kelly, Keeper of Irish Antiquities, suggests the men were sacrificed to make the land fertile – perhaps a version of the slaying of the Corn King in bygone times.



No one has yet cited John Grigsby's *Warriors of the Wasteland – A Quest for the Pagan Sacrificial Cult behind the Grail Legend* (Watkins Publishing, 2002). He notes that bog bodies often appear to have been subjected to three separate types of killing, many of them had red hair (in a few cases there is some evidence they had been painted green or some other vivid colour) and last meals had typically consisted of cereals. With dazzling detective work, Grigsby traces associations between such recurring bog body findings and major motifs in the Grail Legend by studying elements in pagan Celtic and other ancient myths, teasing out themes such as the "triple deaths" of kings and the idea of the king and the land being one.

# CLASSICAL CORNER



FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

## 72. OFF WITH THEIR HEADS!

The report of beheaded bodies and a chained skeleton just discovered in York [FT203:21] quotes Patrick Ottaway's "bafflement, as the Romans had no tradition of decapitation," plus the claim that the manacled bones are "a unique find".

In fact, though 'decapitate' is a late Latin word, first attested c. AD 685, the Romans had a regular verb 'decollare', and were detruncators throughout their history. Beheading (by axe or sword) was prescribed for treason in their earliest law code, the Twelve Tables (no9 para5), and is confirmed (along with burning alive) as "supreme punishment" (*Digest*, bk48 ch19 para28; cf. the *Legal Opinions of Paulus* (c.AD 300), and is specified for such offences as assault (*Theodosian Code*, bk 9 ch10. para1) and failing to destroy libellous writings (*Theodosian Code*, bk9 ch34 para7).

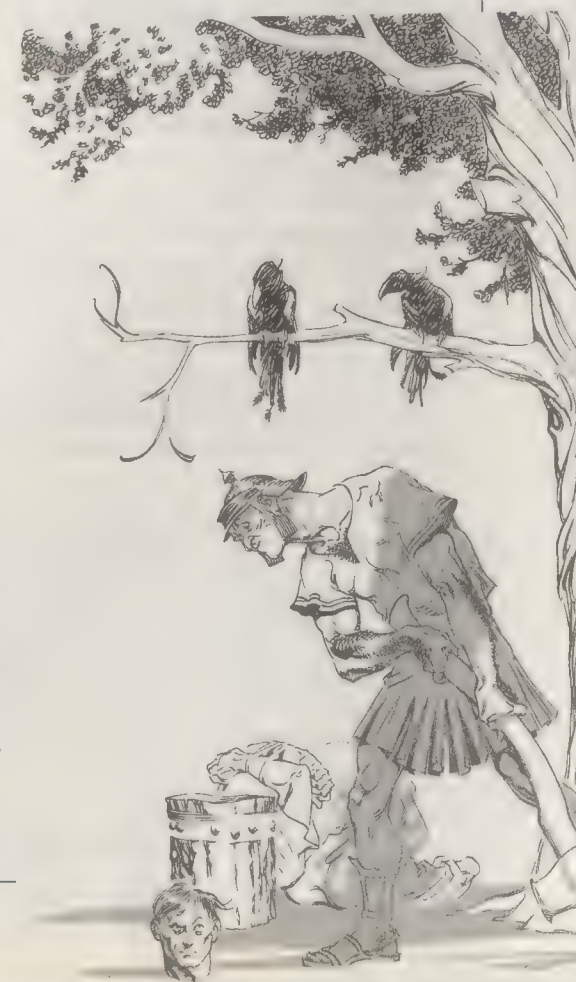
Decapitation was in principle reserved for full Roman citizens (*Digest*, bk48 ch19 para8). Thus, Tertullian (*On the Correction of Heretics*, ch36) asserts that St Paul was beheaded, i.e. not crucified, as Peter. Eusebius (*Church History*, bk5 ch1 paras44; bk5 ch4 para3) records that emperor Marcus Aurelius ordered Christian Romans to be decapitated, non-citizens to be thrown to the lions, adding: "Need I go through lists of martyrs, distinguishing those beheaded from those given to the beasts?"

Seneca (*On Anger*, bk2 ch5 para5) tells how a governor of Asia had 300 prisoners beheaded by axe in one day. The executioner who took two "trembling blows" (Tacitus, *Annals*, bk15 ch67 paras6-8) – fewer than for Mary Queen of Scots – to despatch the officer Flavius then boasted to Nero he had done it with "a blow and a half," coining the Latin word 'sesquiplagia'. Caligula (Suetonius, ch32 para1) had victims lopped during his lurches by "a soldier expert at decapitation". The same emperor (Suetonius, ch30 para2) wished the Roman People had only one neck to cut. Seneca (*Pumpkinification of Claudius*, ch6 para2) says that ruler's "shaking hand was always steady when it came to beheading." The physician Scribonius Largus (*Prescriptions*, ch194) describes how fevers cause patients' tongues "to quiver like those of decapitated men." Lucian (*The Ship*, ch33) remarks: "It is the law to behead anyone deserting the ranks". Artemidorus's *Dream Book* (bk1 ch35; cf. my forthcoming FT review) pronounces: "If a man dreams he is beheaded through due process of law, it is inauspicious" – Well, it would be,

wouldn't it?

As to bound bones, Pliny the Younger (*Letters*, bk7 no27 paras 7-11) reports how a house-haunting ghost with clanking chains was exorcised after they unearthed its chained human skeleton in the garden. Lucian (*Lover of Lies*, ch29) says that such phantoms were common. The York one might simply have been a prisoner, perhaps uncommonly dangerous. Such have been discovered elsewhere – "Google's" 107,200 sites furnish many examples. Ottaway's notion of some religious significance is also plausible. Chained skeletons have been found in early Bronze Age sites (cf. ER Dodds, *The Ancient Concept of Progress*, Oxford, 1986, p152), while the illustrations to F Cumont's *The Mysteries of Mithra* (tr. TJ McCormack, Open Court Press, Chicago, 1903) include one unearthed at Saarebourg.

"Some of them (sc. the damned) are corpses, skeletons, mummies, twitching, tottering, animated by companions that have been damned alive" – Fort, *Books*, p3.





## Strange deaths UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL



NORTH NEWS & PICTURES LTD

SCOTT MARTIN (ABOVE) FROM WHITBURN, Sunderland, bled to death on Christmas Eve 2005, aged just 20, after having three infected teeth removed. He suffered from cirrhosis of the liver and auto-immune hepatitis, which thinned his blood and prevented his body from healing properly. He spent the last six months of his life in a wheelchair. The underlying cause of death was his lifelong refusal to eat anything apart from chips, buttered toast made from sliced white bread, and the occasional tin of Morrison's baked beans. Another young man killed by his diet was Darren Bull, 21, a bricklayer from Rayleigh, Essex, felled by a fatal heart attack in the street one Saturday last July. He refused to eat anything apart from burgers, chips, kebabs and fry-ups, which clogged his arteries with cholesterol. Both men had refused to eat any fresh fruit or vegetables. *D.Mail*, 17 Jan; *Sunday Mirror*, 22 Jan 2006.

MOUV NGET, A 36-YEAR-OLD CAMBODIAN man, became angry when fellow revellers at a party in Sampouv Loeun accused him of being a ghost and not a real man. He left the party and returned with a stick and then a knife. After being thrown out both times, he went home and returned with a Chinese hand grenade "to prove he was alive"; but the grenade accidentally blew up in his hand, killing him and seriously wounding five others. Perhaps he was able to attend a subsequent party as a real ghost... *Canberra Times*, 11 Dec 2005.

THE BODY OF ROBERT GARNETT, 35, WAS found in his bedroom in Lambeth Road, Kennington, south London, on 4 December 2005. His sister had raised the alarm when he failed to turn up for work. He was dressed in two S&M suits inside a giant latex sheath, and had been cooked alive. His body temperature had rocketed, causing his brain to swell. Investigations revealed that he had a background in S&M, so the death was deemed either suicide or a tragic accident. *D.Mirror*, 7 Dec; *Eve Standard*, 16 Dec 2005.

A WOMAN WAS COOKED ALIVE AFTER getting her bottom wedged in a cauldron of boiling lard. Marica Jakopac, 67, from the Croatian village of Jagnjic Dol, was melting solidified pig fat when she fell in. A neighbour who heard her screams pulled her out, but she died soon afterwards. (London) *Eve Standard*, 16 Jan 2006.

A DOG APPARENTLY FELL FROM A HIGHWAY overpass in suburban Detroit and crashed through a car windshield, fatally injuring the driver, Charles G Jetchick, 81. A passenger suffered minor injuries. Investigators didn't believe the 60-70lb (27-32kg) Labrador retriever had been thrown, but rather fell while trying to avoid a car. *Canberra Times*, 21 Jan 2006.

A TENPIN BOWLER COLLAPSED AND DIED ON 30 December 2005 at a bowling alley in Michigan shortly after rolling the third perfect game of his life. Ed Lorenz, 69,

bowled a 300 – the highest possible score – in his first league game of the night at Airway Lanes in the town of Portage. When he got up to bowl in the fifth frame of his second game, he clutched his chest and fell over, and efforts to revive him failed. "If he could have written a way to go out, this would be it," said Johnny Masters, who was bowling with Lorenz. *Irish Examiner*, *Northern Territory News*, 31 Dec 2005.

GAURI RANI CHAKRABORTY, A 55-YEAR-OLD diabetic, was admitted to Sambhunath Pandit Hospital in Kolkata (Calcutta), India, on 7 November 2005 with high blood pressure and post-surgery complications after undergoing a cataract operation in a private nursing home. On 13 November she shrieked for help, but nurses told her it was normal to feel pain from post-surgery infection and left her unattended. When her family lifted the bandage on her left eye the following morning, they saw a gaping hole swarming with big black ants. She died the next day. "It's not uncommon for ants to attack diabetic patients," said hospital superintendent A Adhikary. *[AFP,R,AP]* 15 Nov 2005.

AN INFESTATION OF MAGGOTS OF THE screw-worm fly (*Chrysomya bezziana*) was discovered in the mouth of a 79-year-old woman in Hong Kong on 6 October after she developed chills and bleeding. She was admitted to hospital in Tuen Mun but died the same day. It was said to be the third infestation by flies of humans in 2005 – whether this was just in Hong Kong is not clear. *Adelaide Advertiser*, 7 Oct 2005.

FOOTBALL FAN HRVOJE STANISIC, 22, FIRED a gun to celebrate Croatia beating Sweden – and accidentally shot himself dead. *Sun*, 12 Oct 2005.

A TEENAGER DIED WHILE TRYING TO retrieve a cross thrown into a lake by a Greek Orthodox priest during an Epiphany ceremony in central Greece. Christos Meletis, 19, ignored warnings that the water was too cold and dove into the lake at the village of Kefalovryso. His brother, who also jumped into the lake to catch the cross, was treated for shock. The person who retrieves the cross is traditionally believed to win a year's good luck. The cause of Christos's death had not been determined. *Independent*, 11 Jan 2006.

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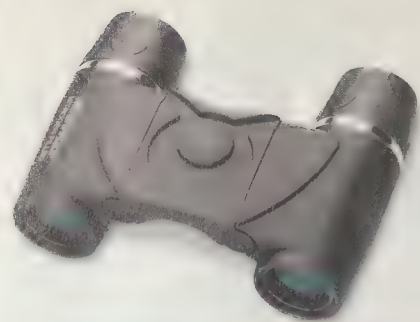
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## A TO Z: I FOR ITALIAN UFOS

One of the frustrating things about Europe is that, while it covers a vast area and boasts well over 100,000 recorded UFO sightings, the lack of a common language often limits the spread of this information.

Italy, for instance, offers a wealth of fascinating UFO material, much of which remains unfamiliar in English-speaking countries. It can boast the first significant alien contact case on the Continent, creating the template for hundreds that followed. This occurred on 14 August 1947, only weeks after the phrase "flying saucer" was born in the USA, and involved amateur prospector and writer Rapuzzi Johannis, who came upon a disc-shaped craft that had landed in the Alps, near the village of Villa Santina, and was then confronted by some of its occupants. The beings were child-sized with pasty faces and large round eyes, and were dressed in tight-fitting clothes. They have some similarities with the 'greys' prominent in contemporary UFO lore. They attacked Johannis with a beam of light fired from their belts, knocking him back down the slope and rendering him senseless as they departed.

The first major wave of Italian cases followed in spring 1950, and included one of the first sightings alleged to provide physical evidence. That April, a witness at Varese saw a landed disc that appeared to be under repair by its silver-suited humanoid crew. Bits of metal recovered from the scene were taken away by investigating military authorities, but local ufologists were later able to find some scraps. Sadly, analysis revealed only a mundane bronze-like alloy.

A second wave occurred in Italy – and across much of Europe – in the autumn of 1954. On 21 October – the same day as Britain's first major alien contact case at Ranton, Staffordshire (see **FT188:23**) – a humanoid emerged from a UFO at Melito and immediately fired a green beam at witnesses. Curiously, the alien appeared to be scared off by the attentions of an over-zealous dog.

One of the most extraordinary cases came on 1 November 1954 at Cennina, near Florence. A woman crossing a field on her way to church came upon an object the size of a car. It was an odd, spindle-like shape with a glass window or door in the side. As she stared at the craft, two child-sized figures emerged from behind it and attempted to grab her (artist's impression above). They wore cloaks and

## The beings attacked Johannis with a beam of light



skullcaps and spoke in a litig tongue. The entities snatched some flowers the woman was carrying, but as they tried to point something towards her in a seemingly aggressive manner, she took the opportunity to run.

By the time the woman reached the police to seek assistance, her memory of the events was already fading, like a dream. Indeed, during the sighting she had been in an oddly detached state of consciousness. Villagers converged on the site, finding only a crater where the spindle had stood. The local farmer had hurried there when his sons told him they had seen the woman being accosted by strange little men. With so many people milling around before senior police arrived, there was no chance of any meaningful forensic investigation into the bizarre assault.

Further waves followed in the autumn of 1973 and 1978, with similar alien encounters

(attacks on witnesses appear more common than in other European nations).

From 1976, the Italian Air Force started to co-operate with the local UFO community, although in a somewhat haphazard fashion – and sometimes responded oddly. One illustration of this was on 18 June 1979. A senior warrant officer was doing an aerial survey over the Apennines when the radar base at Istrana contacted him to say they had a low-flying target they could not identify and instructed him to investigate. As it was late morning on a clear day, he soon spotted the large, opaque cylinder shape as he closed to within 200ft (60m).

During the next few minutes, he took several photographs, making this potentially one of the most important cases on record from anywhere in the world. It's almost unheard of to find film and radar evidence of the same UFO, and – even more remarkably – ground observers were watching it through binoculars from Treviso air base, reporting that the thing was leaving a bluish trail.

As the pilot circled the object, taking further photos, the UFO simply vanished. However, he had the evidence on film, and when the pictures were developed they showed the object in detail.

While still in the Air Force, he had to keep silent, but on his retirement in 1983, and with a new liberal attitude leading to the release of official files, he approached his local MP and pressed for his records and the images to be made public. The authorities confirmed the incident in November 1984, but insisted that it had all been "unequivocally identified by photo interpretation personnel as a cylindrical balloon constructed from black plastic bags". The Italian government chose not to release the actual photos to support their case, leaving the pilot to insist in exasperation that what he had spent some time circling at close quarters was definitely no balloon.

In 1985, the air force did release the photographs – not to the pilot or his MP, but to a sceptical magazine that used them to illustrate how UFO cases can be readily solved. The pilot, on seeing these images (which certainly do look like a small toy balloon) said that these were *not* the photographs he had taken from his aircraft.

After much pressure, the official file on the case was released in 1986, but still minus any of the photographs (including those published in the magazine). The accompanying report now carried the rather different conclusion that the events were considered to be unexplained...

Jenny Randles

## FLYING SAUCERY

ANDY ROBERTS & DR DAVID CLARKE PRESENT THEIR REGULAR SURVEY OF THE LATEST FACTS AND FLAPS FROM THE WORLD OF UFOLOGY

### ALIEN FOUND IN THE ATTIC

Screenwriter Barney Broom made a spooky discovery while clearing out the attic of an old cottage he is renovating at Gunthorpe in Norfolk. For lying among the junk was a cloudy toffee jar (right) containing an elaborately crafted model alien, of the classic 'grey' variety! On further examination, Broom discovered the jar containing the foot tall model – complete with distinctive black eyes – was wrapped in an old copy of the *Daily Mirror* dated October 1947. The implied connection with the Roswell incident was increased when an examination of the model revealed "a US serial number" on its four-toed foot. Interviewed by his local newspaper, Broom said he believed the model was a child's toy that may have come from one of the nearby US bases. But the implied links with Roswell and 1947 led him to report his find to the Sci-Fi Channel, who were "investigating". They contacted the US Defense Department who, not surprisingly, were unable to comment. This chain of events makes us suspicious, as does the similarity between the "alien in a bottle" and the hoax "dragon in a bottle" that was supposedly found in a Sussex garage in January 2004. As *FT* reported (**FT182:6-7; 185:13**), the latex dragon turned out to be a publicity stunt to promote a fantasy novel by author Allistair Mitchell. Now we have a story linking a model alien, a scriptwriter and Roswell just a couple of months before the release of a movie called *Alien Autopsy* starring British comedy duo Ant and Dec. Remember, you read it here first! *Guardian*, *Eastern Daily Press* (Norwich), 6 Feb 2006; [www.alien-autopsy.com](http://www.alien-autopsy.com)



## The model may have come from a nearby US base

### NEW UFO ZINE EMERGES

Since Graham Birdsall's untimely death in 2003, the UK UFO community has been without a widely available magazine. True, there are a few Internet e-zines, but these tend towards self-indulgence, and, essentially, nothing beats having a printed magazine in your hands. Now Russ Callaghan, Graham's son-in-law and former staff writer on *UFO Magazine*, has taken the plunge and is editing and publishing the bimonthly *UFO DATA*. Issue one is a 48-page, colour magazine that exhibits the same production values as *UFO Magazine*. It's well laid out and informative and this and subsequent issues come with a CD-ROM or DVD. Russ intends to cover current UFO news, articles and archive cases, but with the added value of a specific theme for

each issue. The Rendlesham Forest event is the focus of the first issue with contributions from Georgina Bruni and astronomer Andrew Pike, who hints at his knowledge of some hitherto unknown dark conspiracy connected with the case. Russ freely admits it is 'pro-UFO', and hardcore sceptics will view the magazine with frustration. But forteans will appreciate the need for a publication that is inclusive of all aspects of ufology, and the curious reader needs this type of magazine to provide an insight into the UFO scene. At £2.95 including p&p, it's a bargain. Besides *UFO Data*, Russ and his team, which includes Philip Mantle, are staging the annual Great British UFO Show in Leeds on

7-8 October, which will feature, among others, Andy Roberts speaking about the Foo Fighters of WWII. After a few years in the doldrums, *UFO Data* could be the catalyst which breathes new life into ufology in the UK, and comes with our recommendation. [www.ufodata.co.uk](http://www.ufodata.co.uk)

### UK UNVEILS NEW SPYPLANE

Secret American black projects, such as the U2 and Stealth, have long been linked with UFO sightings, particularly those describing mysterious silent triangular objects (see **FT204:29**). But the role played by unmanned combat air vehicles (UCAVs), used extensively in Iraq and Afghanistan, has often been overlooked. In January, the first images of the UK's very own prototype stealth surveillance aircraft – known as the Corax or Raven – were unveiled by BAE systems (below). The tiny body and long outer wings are designed to allow the unmanned aircraft to fly fairly high and slowly as it carries out surveillance of enemy territory. But Bill Sweetman of *Jane's International Defence Review* says it would be possible to add swept-back wings and adapt the aircraft for use in swift, offensive action against an enemy. According to experts, the MoD is so impressed by the performance of Corax that it has scrapped plans for future manned combat aircraft. One story suggests the UK is working closely with the USA on "Project Churchill" which will concentrate operations on stealthy unmanned aircraft from 2015 onwards. Soon after this story appeared, a couple described seeing what they believed were "two F-117 nighthawk [Stealth] aircraft flying right in front of us at a height of about 75 feet [23m]" as they drove near Croft Hill in Leicestershire. "It was pitch black and we could make out no outline of the aircraft – only its three lights in a triangular shape," Donna Harding wrote in a letter to her local newspaper. "Anybody not familiar with aircraft may have thought they were UFOs, or maybe they were!" *BBC News Online*, 16 Jan; *Leicester Mercury*, 24 Jan 2006.





# The Lost Ark

## A Cryptozoology

# 2006 Karl Shuker

## Status Report

KARL SHUKER, Fortean Times's regular correspondent, looks back on the fascinating discoveries made during 2005 and forward to exciting new prospects in the world of cryptozoology.

**D**oesn't time fly when you're having fun? Reading through Chris Moiser's *Ninki-Nanka* article in the following selection of crypto features, in which he refers to the carcass of the Gambian mystery beast washed up on Bungalow Beach back in the 1980s, I was shocked to realise that it is 20 years since my first full-length cryptozoological article was published – a two-part account of that self-same beached cryptid in a now long-defunct British magazine called *The Unknown* (my article was later republished in updated, expanded form in FT67:35–37). It hardly needs stating that in the succeeding two decades an awful lot has happened in the challenging world of cryptozoology, which has seen countless expeditions, discoveries, rediscoveries, new theories proposed and old theories rejected.

One thing about this subject is that it is never dull or stagnant. Even a single year, as exemplified by 2005, can yield a diverse array of headlines – which also ably demonstrate the many fronts on which cryptozoology continues to advance. Take new discoveries and rediscoveries, for instance. True, the real stars of the subject – such as Nessie, Bigfoot and *mokele-mbembe* – continue to elude us, but the past 12 months or so have provided surprises to encourage hope of greater revelations to come.

New discoveries since the beginning of 2005 have included: a new snubfin dolphin from Australia; a new right whale; a major new mangabey monkey from Tanzania; an entirely new taxonomic family of rodents, courtesy of the bizarre Laotian rock rat or *kha-nyou*, *Laonastes aenigmamus*; a novel species of woolly lemur named after Monty Python star John Cleese; a deadly new box jelly; and (yawn) even more new species of South American monkey. Rediscoveries were headed by the spectacular resurrection of North America's ivory-billed woodpecker *Campephilus principalis* (notwithstanding a few dissenting voices claiming that the observed bird in question was nothing more than a pileated woodpecker; personally, I find the evidence obtained for the existence of at least one living ivory-bill too convincing for that to be likely). Plus, as exclusively revealed in Loren Coleman's excellent cryptomundo website, we had a plausible sighting of the equally elusive, and even bigger, imperial woodpecker, *C. imperialis*. And even as I write this piece in February 2006, the newspapers are full of reports concerning a dramatic tally of new and rediscovered species (including birds of paradise and bowerbirds) uncovered within a mist-shrouded 'lost world' high up in the remote Foja Mountains of Irian Jaya in western New Guinea.

Of course, excluding those rare but magical instances when a notable

new discovery is made entirely by chance, with no prior planning or search (e.g. the *kha-nyou*), cryptids will only be unveiled if a conscious effort is made to track them down. Hence it is good to know that the interest and willingness to seek such creatures, which in recent years has increased very considerably (and has been reflected accordingly in enhanced, serious media coverage), continues apace. And so, in 2005 we saw expeditions to Mongolia in search of its formidable death worm, to Malaysia in search of its very own version of Bigfoot, to the Himalayas for yeti data by a fact-finding team from Disney, and plans drawn up for quests in 2006 to Central Africa in pursuit of the *Mokele-Mbembe* and other Congolese cryptids, Chris Moiser's ongoing *Ninki-Nanka* investigations in West Africa, and forays after man-beasts in South America.

To reaffirm an opinion aired half a century ago by Dr Bernard Heuvelmans, I have little doubt that if any major cryptozoological discoveries remain to be made on land, they will occur in the remote, mountainous rainforests and swamplands of regions like tropical Africa, Madagascar, Asia, South America, and northwestern Australia. So it is very encouraging to know that there are still researchers and investigators out there willing to pit themselves against the inhospitable conditions of such localities in order to expose their secrets. Moreover, it is no longer being left entirely to enthusiastic, self-funded laymen to do the hard work. Fully equipped, sizeable scientific explorations in search of new species – at one time every bit as scarce as the creatures themselves – are nowadays becoming ever more frequent, and successful.

**O**f the wide assortment of cryptids currently being sought, I still feel that the likeliest to be revealed and formally confirmed by science as a major new species is the Sumatran *orang-pendek*, subject of two expeditions by the CFZ, as discussed here in Richard Freeman's article, as well as an ongoing WWF-associated search headed by veteran *orang-pendek* seeker Debbie Martyr. Needless to say, the revelation in 2004 that the nearby island of Flores was home until at least as recently as 12,000 years ago to a species of dwarf human, *Homo floresiensis*, and that there are even modern reports of such beings (*ebu gogo*) still existing here, have done the *orang-pendek's* credibility no harm at all, creating a significant precedent for a "short man" elsewhere in the Sunda Islands. Furthermore, even before the bones of *H. floresiensis* had been discovered, unique, unclassifiable hair samples and footprints purported to

be from the *orang-pendek* had been obtained, giving its status as a valid undiscovered species considerable weight.

Of course, for every convincing piece of cryptozoological evidence procured, many more enigmatic, ambiguous examples are also proffered, and 2005 once again did not disappoint. So, take your pick from a motley collection of crypto-curiosities that included some controversial unpublished photos purporting to show the back of a living thylacine or Tasmanian wolf; a highly controversial "tooth" said to have been found embedded in a half-eaten deer carcass at Loch Ness; an intriguing video of an alleged Bigfoot filmed at Nelson River in Manitoba; a carving from Cameroon ostensibly depicting the horned swamp-dwelling *emela-ntouka* or killer of elephants; and photos in India's Kerala State of pygmy elephants known locally as *kallaana*.

More satisfactory was the procurement of a DNA sample confirming the long-claimed but hitherto-unproved existence of at least one moose existing in the forests of New Zealand; the vindication of a long-held belief of mine that the European eagle owl *Bubo bubo* is now breeding in the UK; the first filming of a living giant squid (by Japanese scientists off the Ogasawara Islands); and the unexpected photographing of a mysterious civet-like beast in Borneo that may prove to be a virtually unknown species called Hose's palm civet, *Diplogale hosei* (below).

There is little doubt that DNA techniques offer the way forward in determining the zoological identity of biological material that previously would – and did – remain unclassifiable and contentious. Globsters, for example, which were once the bane of marine biologists and the delight of monster devotees, can now be readily identified via their DNA in spite of their bizarre morphological appearance. In addition, motion-sensor cameras, which the Bornean mystery beast triggered (FT206:4–5), may well snap some further surprises in the remote jungles where they are being set up by field researchers investigating these regions' biodiversity. Indeed, this, I feel, offers the best hope for obtaining conclusive evidence for the survival of the thylacine and certain other highly reclusive, medium-sized quadrupeds.

Having said that, searching for cryptids, analysing physical remains claimed to be from cryptids, and photographing cryptids all rely on the – very big – assumption that these creatures are real. But one of the major problems facing any cryptozoological investigation is determining whether the mystery beast in question is indeed real, as opposed to wholly mythical, or even paranormal. The articles presented here span this entire



spectrum – from the indisputably zoological *orang-pendek* and the semi (?) mythical *ninki-nanka* to what appears to be a wholly folkloristic water monster of Italy's Lake Maggiore (echoing in many ways the long-running saga of China's Lake Tianchi monster, represented by a further flurry of sightings in 2005), and reports of Australian yowies that feature certain decidedly preternatural aspects. Some cryptozoologists frown upon the merest suggestion that any cryptid could exhibit paranormal behaviour, but this is a facet of cryptozoology that has surfaced time and again through the decades in relation to a range of different creatures, and is a subject as worthy of serious attention and recognition as the creatures – or creature-like entities? – themselves.

**L**astly, it is a pleasure to see so many worthy new additions to the cryptozoological literature in the form of books, articles, websites, and other sources of information, for 2005 was certainly rich in all of these. As I stated in a recent FT book review (FT205:65), cryptozoology seems to have entered a new golden age of published literature, with more information on hand than ever before for the enthusiastic newcomer and the knowledgeable veteran alike. Back when my interest in cryptozoology began, over 30 years ago, there were far fewer readily accessible sources available, but there was one slim book (which I still have) and its accompanying television series that whetted my appetite just as much in those days as any of today's major crypto-tomes would do now – which is why I am so pleased to see Martin Gately's article, recalling for a new generation, and bringing back fond memories for my contemporaries, the sheer delight and fascination that was David Attenborough's *Fabulous Animals*. The fact that this enchanting series was never repeated or issued on video (or, as yet, DVD) never ceases to amaze me, because it was a true landmark in cryptozoological television. BBC Archives, take note – and reissue!

Little did I know when watching that pioneering crypto-show 30 years ago that a decade later I would be making my own first contribution to its subject, and that two decades after that I'd be writing this introduction to the following selection of articles heralding another promising crypto year. But that is the joy of cryptozoology – and long may it continue. **FT**

### Author Biography

KARL SHUKER is a zoologist, lecturer and regular contributor to Fortean Times. His most recent book is *The Beasts That Hide From Man* (2003).





# Into the lost valley

In 2003, RICHARD FREEMAN was part of a Centre for Fortean Zoology expedition to Sumatra. In May 2004, he returned for a follow-up visit in search of giant snakes, mystery cats and the elusive *orang-pendek*. Photographs courtesy of the author.

**O**f all the mystery primates in the world, none has attracted such attention in recent years as Sumatra's *orang-pendek* (the name means "short man" in the local language). Reported since the days of the Dutch colonists and subject of remarkably consistent sightings in recent years – most notably by conservationist Debbie Martyr, who claimed to have seen the *orang-pendek* on more than one occasion (see FT83:19; 182:37) – it may turn out to be a real creature as yet unknown to science.

In 2003, a CFZ expedition set out in search of *orang-pendek* and another cryptid reported from the Sumatran jungle – the *cigau* (pronounced chigow), a big cat described as smaller and stockier than a tiger, with a lion-like mane, golden fur and a short tail (see FT182:32-39 for a full report of the expedition). We had hoped that one of the hair samples we had brought back would prove to be from either the *orang-pendek* or the *cigau*; Dr Lars Thomas's tests, though, established that the smaller grey hairs turned out to belong, as I'd suspected, to the Malayan tapir, while the longer brown ones were from an Asian golden cat.

The 2004 expedition aimed to explore the "lost valley" Debbie Martyr had told us about on our previous visit. Situated beyond the lake of Gunung Tuju, it had never been penetrated by Western explorers. Once again, along with Dr Chris Clarke and Jon Hare, I prepared to head into the unknown.

## GODZILLA BLOOM & GIANT SNAKES

Our first destination was the village of Kersik Tua, and the house of Mr Subandi – a keen naturalist and gracious host whom we had met the previous year. Mr Subandi had uncovered some recent *orang-pendek* witnesses less than an hour's drive away in a village called Te Uik Air Putih.

By a remarkable stroke of luck, a specimen of the *Titan*

*arum*, the world's largest flower (below), and one that blossoms only once every 10 years, was blooming nearby – an unmissable opportunity.

The village backed onto an area called "the garden", cultivated land that is used for growing crops but which merges with the jungle seamlessly and is, in some areas, very overgrown. Due to the garden's more open nature, one usually encounters more wildlife here than in the jungle proper, and this is where the *T. arum* was to be found.

It lived up to its name; it is truly the Godzilla of flowers, looking like some strange surrealist sculpture or something made by the BBC special effects department. It stood 7ft (2m) tall, the elephant's foot of a stem widening into a barrel-sized green bowl. This in turn flared out into the petal, which looked like nothing so much as a Spanish Flamenco dancer's red dress. Finally, a phallic stamen of bright yellow stabbed upwards from within the petal's folds.

The scent of the *T. arum* is said to be like rotting flesh; it is pollinated by flies attracted to what they assume is a cadaver. We could detect no such smell around our flower – but close by the fresh carcass of a bearded pig was

stealing its thunder.

We found the house of the first witness and, with the help of Mr Subandi, interviewed him. His name was Seman, and he had seen the creature in an area of land adjacent to a river at mid-day during February 2004. The area was overgrown, and the creature had only been visible from the waist up. It had short black hair, a broad chest with pink skin visible on it, and a pointed head, possibly indicating a sagittal crest, with long ears. The creature vanished, and Seman said that he had the feeling it had fled to the river and swum across it, though he did not see this. The thing had

ABOVE: The amazing *Titan arum* growing in "the garden".





been in view for about three minutes.

Seman produced a sketch showing a powerfully built, ape-like creature with broad shoulders, long arms, and a conical head. At no time did it raise its arms, as gibbons are wont to do on the rare occasions they descend to the ground.

Our next witness, in the same area, was a young man in his twenties by the name of Ata. He had seen his creature one morning around 10am, about three weeks after Seman's sighting. He had heard strange cries – a loud OOOHA! OOOHA! sound – coming from the same general vicinity where Seman's encounter had taken place. Upon investigation, Ata managed to reach a point only 5m (16ft) from a strange beast. It was 1m (3ft) tall, with short black hair. The prominent chest gave the impression it was female; its lower half was hidden by vegetation. He noticed that it had large owl-like eyes, a flat nose, and a large mouth. It seemed aggressive, and Ata said he had felt the hairs on the back of his hands rise up in fear.

He produced a drawing of a muscular, upright creature, with large round eyes, but lacking the pointed head of Seman's description.

The next day, we were reunited with Sahar, our guide from the 2003 expedition. He casually told us that he had seen a giant snake captured by a jungle-dwelling tribe called the Kubu. We instantly recognised this as the story that had reached the British press of a 49ft (15m)-long, 985lb (450kg) python called "Fragrant Flower" (FT181:21). The giant reptile had reputedly been looked on as an elder by the tribe. It was alleged that Imam Darmanto, the owner of a zoo in Java, had persuaded the Kubu to part with the giant – although it had taken 65 men and the blessing of a tribal leader to capture it. The snake was transported to Java, where it was put on display and fed a diet of dogs. Unfortunately, when the *Guardian* sent over a reporter with a tape measure, Fragrant Flower had shrunk to 23ft (7m). It seemed that the whole story was a publicity stunt by Mr Darmanto to promote his tawdry zoo.

Sahar confirmed that the snake had been about 7m long; more interestingly, he also promised to take us to talk to the very tribe who had captured it when we returned from the lost valley.



ABOVE: Approaching the lost valley; "towering mesas loomed out of the jungle".

## Ata had felt the hairs on his arms rise up in fear

### FROM THE GARDEN TO THE JUNGLE

We were ready to begin our trek towards the lost valley. Along with Sahar's brother John and porter Pak Nadur, we set off from the village of Kutang Gajha (which the Indonesian dictionary insists means "elephant's bra").

The track, though not as steep as those we'd tackled the previous year, had been turned into a quagmire by cattle and rain; consequently, the going was slow and tiring. We watched a troop of pig-tailed macaques through binoculars as they snooped around some farm buildings in search of any food they could pilfer.

We finally came upon an abandoned hut of the kind farmers build to shelter in when tending their crops. It was obvious that no one had inhabited it for years. It stood on wooden stilts and was festooned in cobwebs and fading graffiti. We decided to spend the night in this malodorous shanty. Sahar's brother had not brought a sleeping bag and had to fashion a crude equivalent out of plastic sacking. During the night, he was beset by ants. Another unwelcome visitor was a gigantic spider, four inches across, that Sahar discovered scuttling around the floor. It was, he told us, venomous – not fatal, but certainly painful. We ejected it from the hut, but next morning I discovered it – or a similar one – in my sock!

We sallied on. The path was dull and difficult, and the mud slowed us to a snail's pace. Gradually, the garden began to give way to the jungle. We walked for hours, becoming increasingly fatigued until night approached and we stumbled across a small and familiar-looking stream. Behind the stream was the

shanty. We had come full circle and wasted a whole day. We climbed the ladder into the hut and retired to bed in poor spirits.

Next day we set out along a different path, and once again became lost. Sahar, it seemed, was not *au fait* with this area. By pure chance, we came across a farmhouse. The family not only put us up for the night but also found us a man called Pak En who knew the way to the lost valley. He was a sprightly old fellow who had ventured into the valley years ago on a fishing trip, and he agreed to be our guide for the next few days.

In the morning, we set out for the lost valley with Pak En leading the way. We trekked upward into the jungle. As we progressed, we encountered a major leech problem: dozens of the micro-vampires silently attached themselves to our legs. Sahar had a novel way of thwarting the tiny horrors. He daubed our boots with damp tobacco. It seems that leeches abhor the stuff.

Towering mesas loomed out of the jungle.

Behind them, a fat daytime moon was fully visible, giving the vista an alien look. Sahar came across the droppings of a sun bear; although they are the smallest of the bears (about the size of a big St Bernard dog) they are second only to the polar bear in terms of ferocity, sporting outsized claws for ripping into rotten logs in search of insects or honey. They can just as easily rip flesh.

Finally we came to the valley, and it became clear that there was a damn good reason why it was lost. Sheer cliffs fell 300m (1,000ft) into rapids. The sides of the valley were swathed in savagely thorned rattan. We had no rope. If we wanted to see the bottom of the valley we would have to risk scrambling down by hand.

### INTO THE VALLEY

Pak En found a part of the valley wall that was slightly less than perpendicular and we gingerly began our descent. What looked like solid ground would often be no more than loose topsoil and would cascade from underfoot. Sturdy-looking branches would turn out to be rotten and snap when used for support. Half sliding, half walking we made our way down to the bottom.

Walking out into the sunshine of this river-carved gorge, it was astounding to think that I was the first Westerner ever to set foot here. The river was neither deep nor very wide, but it was fast-flowing and its bed a mass of slippery rocks. The only place large enough to set up camp was in a small area of jungle close to where we had descended.

In camp that night, in the eerie light given off by thousands of green fireflies, Pak En told us about his own meeting with an *orang-pendek* in the jungle just above the valley three years earlier.

He was walking along a trail when he saw it approaching. His description was very similar to those of the witnesses we had questioned earlier: the creature was 1m (3ft) tall, upright, and powerfully built. It had black hair with red tips and a broad mouth. Its prominent breasts made Pak En think it was female. He noticed that it grasped the vegetation as it moved. It let out an OOOHA! OOOHA! sound. He watched it move down the trail for two minutes before it saw him, when it turned quickly about and walked back the way it had come.

After breakfast next morning, we set out to explore the valley, but it was slow progress. More than once, the riverbank petered out into sheer cliffs on one side, forcing us to cross the



ABOVE: The CFZ Sumatra 2004 expedition. BELOW: An artist's impression of *orang-pendek*.

rapids to the other. Landslides had dumped hundreds of tons of earth, rocks and trees at the foot of the cliffs at some points, blocking whole areas and making the journey more arduous as we scrambled over slick boulders or walked across fallen trees.

We saw many small animals, some probably unknown to science: tiny fast-moving fish; a gigantic toad with tiger-like stripes on its hindquarters; oddly flattened tadpoles that stuck to the rocks like sucking loaches. Above us black eagles whirled.

Progress was so slow that we realised that we would not make it to the end of the valley and back to camp before nightfall. The river was treacherous enough by day; in the dark it would be deadly. A broken leg in such a remote area could mean death. Sadly, we had to turn back about three quarters of the way along the valley.

Fascinating though the place was, it didn't look like suitable *orang-pendek* habitat. It was too narrow and there was nothing in it to really justify the arduous climb down – surely, *orang-pendek* would have enough common sense not to bother.

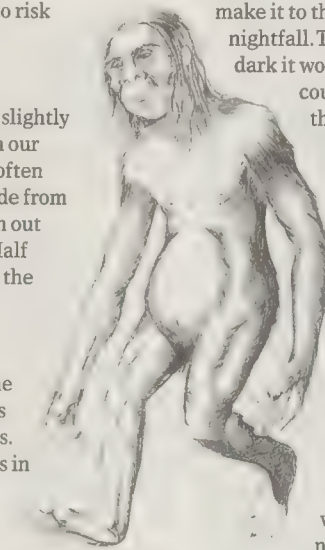
When we once again reached the top of the gorge, Pak En took us to where he had seen his *orang-pendek*, miming the strange way the creature had walked, gripping at the plants as it went. He told us that its outsized muscles reminded him of Mike Tyson.

That night around the campfire, Chris, Jon, and I picked 100 leeches off our legs. The camp was alive with cicadas. Our socks and mosquito nets were festooned with cast-off exoskeletons that looked like little yellow ghosts.

In the morning, Sahar found a long black hair in the camp. It looked human, but was far longer than the hair of anyone in our party. Could it have been from the mane of an *orang-pendek*? We might have brushed past a hair sticking to undergrowth and not noticed. Sahar told us of legends of beautiful longhaired women who lived in the jungle. I found myself hoping that we would stumble upon a tribe of oriental amazons whose men folk had died out (perhaps from exhaustion). I placed the hair in a sample bag.

### THE KUBU

Back at Mr Subandi's, we made plans to visit the Kubu and enquire after giant snakes. After a day of rest and birdwatching with our host, we set off for the lowland jungles of Jambi







ABOVE: Relaxing with the Kubu; Nylam, their chief, is the one wearing red shorts..

## The 10-metre snakes sported cow-like horns

Province. It proved to be a long and largely dull journey, enlivened only by the appearance at dusk of gigantic flying foxes with five-foot (1.5m) wingspans that flew alongside the car. They roosted in huge groups, looking like masses of giant umbrellas in the trees.

We stayed in the unprepossessing and unrelentingly dull town of Bangko, where Sahar found out that one of the men working at the hotel knew the Kubu and could speak their language (which is quite distinct from Indonesian). The man agreed to take us to see the Kubu in two days' time.

In the meantime, we managed to find a restaurant shaped like a steam locomotive which served quite passable food. I wondered whether anyone in the whole world was doing the same thing as us: eating in a train-shaped restaurant while waiting to question tribesmen about giant snakes and ape-men.

We set out the next day, together with our translator, for a bumpy ride along an ill-maintained road into the jungle. The Kubu were once a totally nomadic tribe, but nowadays they alternate spells of months in the jungle with living in houses.

We found the chief of the Kubu, a man named Nylam, in a roadside house with his family and several members of his tribe. He had been suffering from malaria and was glad when I was able to give him some medicine.

With us putting questions to Sahar in English, Sahar asking the translator in Indonesian, and the translator asking the Kubu in their language, we succeeded in conducting an interview.

Nylam confirmed that he and his tribe had indeed captured a large snake. It was a python. When asked about its length he stated that it was 23ft (7m) long. This tallied with both Sahar's estimate and the measurements of the *Guardian* reporter. The snake had been sold to a man in Java. The chief said that they had caught a 26ft (8m) specimen shortly after, but had let it go back into the jungle again.

I asked if any of the Kubu had ever seen a 15-meter snake. They all agreed that they had never seen one so large. I asked how long the largest snake they had seen was. Nylam and

several of his hunters all said they had seen several snakes of 10m (33ft). One in particular had been living close to their habitations about six months ago.

Now came the strange part. All three men were adamant that these 10-metre snakes sported cow-like horns. One man had been within 5m (17ft) of one of the giant snakes and confirmed that it had horns. They also said it had a moss-like growth on its back. I asked them to draw a picture for me but none of them could draw. I produced a quick sketch of a reticulated python to which I added horns. It met with enthusiastic nods of approval.

Stranger still were their beliefs about these huge snakes. Once a snake reaches a very large size, it begins to get fatter and shorter. It grows four legs, each with

five toes. Then it swims out to sea. I drew another picture, this time of an Indo-Pacific crocodile. The Kubu all agreed that this is what the great horned snake eventually becomes. In this form they called it a *naga*. They said it was larger than the common crocodile (or *buaya*, meaning "rascal" in Indonesian).

The Indo-Pacific crocodile does inhabit the region and, at its extreme may reach 10 metres. This is the record length for the reticulated python as well. It is interesting that the term *naga* is used for these creatures. You may recall my 2000 expedition to Thailand in search of the *naga* (see FT166:30-35). In India and Indo China, *naga* specifically refers to a giant crested snake, possibly an unknown species. In Indonesia, *naga* means dragon and appears to be used loosely to describe any monster reptile.

As far as I know this belief that pythons become crocodiles is unique to the Kubu. Quite where such a queer fancy springs from it's hard to say. No one seems to have studied the Kubu and their folklore.

Nylam had also seen an *orang-pendek* in the area only three months ago. He had been up a tree at the time. The animal was 1.25m (4ft) tall and covered with red-tinted, black hair. It had a broad mouth, walked upright and held its arms like a man. It made a WEEEEHP! WEEEEHP! noise, and looked about itself as if it could smell its observer. Nylam watched it for half an hour.

When questioned about the *cigau*, the Kubu had all heard tell of such an animal but none had seen it.

My conviction that *orang-pendek* exists has been strengthened more than ever, though I feel that the *cigau* may now be extinct or very, very rare.

What of the horned snakes? Perhaps, alongside the reticulated python there could be a second, undiscovered species. The horns would probably be modified scales – as in several small types of snake such as the horned viper and rhinoceros viper. Maybe the Sumatran snakes are related to the larger *nagas* of Thailand. Almost predictably, the second CFZ expedition to Sumatra has provided us with more questions than answers. **F**

### Author Biography



RICHARD FREEMAN is one of Britain's few professional cryptozoologists. He worked as a zookeeper before studying zoology and has worked at the Centre for Fortean Zoology, where he is now Zoological Director, since 1996. Richard is planning to lead an expedition to the Gambia in search of Ninki-Nanka later this year. His latest book, *Dragons: More Than a Myth*, is available direct from [www.cfz.org.uk](http://www.cfz.org.uk).

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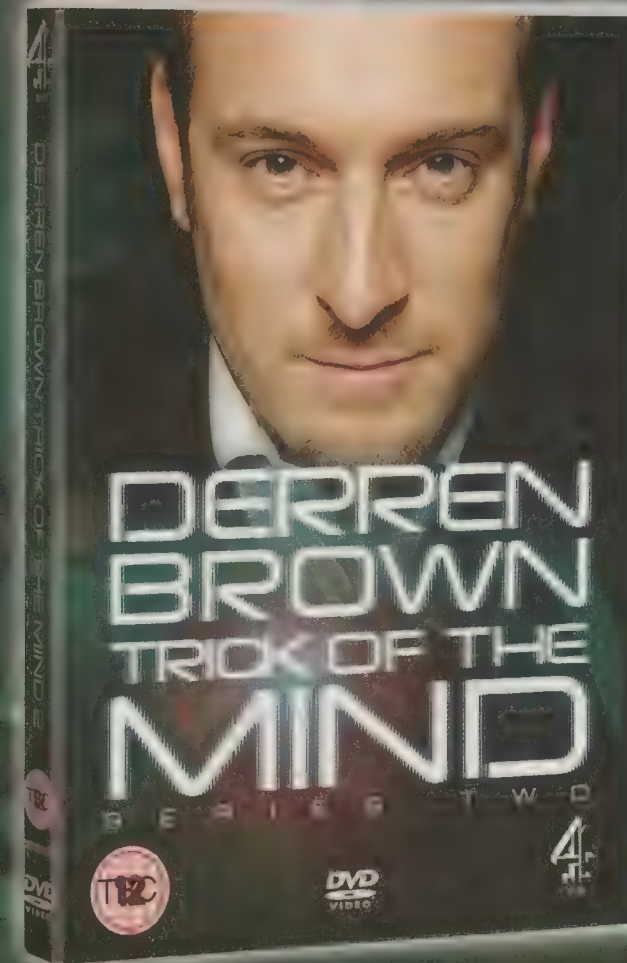
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# Dragons of the Gambia

Zoologist **CHRIS MOISER** has been visiting the Gambia in West Africa for more than a quarter-century, and has become enthralled by local legends of the river-dwelling monster known as “Ninki-Nanka”. An expedition to find it will be returning to the region in 2006.

**M**y first visit to the Gambia in West Africa was in 1980, largely because it was the only sub-Saharan country I could actually afford to get to. Ten years later, as a science lecturer at a College of Further Education, I hatched the idea of returning to Gambia with some of my students on a series of field trips. For the first of these, I set off with 11 students and two other members of staff, our primary objective being to study the mangrove creeks with their highly adapted flora and specialist fauna, as well as to spend time at a small reserve whose nice range of monkey species makes “niche separation” readily observable.

Virtually all Gambia’s tourist hotels are on the Atlantic coast; walking north along the beach from our hotel, we came to another called Bungalow Beach, and I remembered something I’d read some years previously. A letter had appeared in *BBC Wildlife* magazine in 1986 asking for help identifying a dead animal that had been washed up (and subsequently buried) on the beach. The description was that of a plesiosaur-type creature – something that rightly should have been extinct for more than 65 million years. I suppose this was the incident that started my interest in African cryptozoology.

The trip’s success led to repeat visits, and saw my interest in cryptozoology growing. In subsequent years, we returned to the Bungalow Beach area, and on one occasion even managed a quick late-night excavation roughly where the body of the mysterious cryptid is allegedly buried. We didn’t find anything, but at least confirmed that the sand was deep enough for the burial to have taken place. Circumstantially, we also discovered that this beach is one on which a lot of dead marine life – dolphins, and, increasingly, turtles, for instance – is washed up.

As our knowledge of Gambian wildlife – both cryptozoological and conventional – increased, we became aware of a creature

known as the “Ninki-Nanka”.

*Ninki-Nanka* is known across the westernmost part of West Africa, throughout Gambia, Senegal and Guinea. The diversity of peoples and languages in these areas mean that it is also known as “Niniganne” (in Guinea), “Ninger” or “Ningiri” in the Fouta Djallon (the mountainous area of Guinea where the Gambia river starts), and “Rianseau” in Guinea Bissau.

The oldest reference that I could find to the *Ninki-Nanka* was a 1944 article by MDW Jeffries in the *Journal of the Royal African Society*. Jeffries actually considers the possibility of flying prehistoric survivors or giant bats, but in passing briefly mentions a native tradition on the Gambia River. He reports that older fishermen on the river still told stories of an “enormous monster that comes out at night from the ooze and slime of the mangroves and devours whatever it meets”. He then discounts the existence of the animal on the basis that it must leave massive footprints, and these were not found.

After the Yorkshire television series *Arthur C Clarke’s Mysterious World* was broadcast in 1980, Sir Arthur received a letter from Dr Thomas Hardie Dalrymple, a retired medical officer from the West African Medical Service. While stationed on the Gambia River in 1935, Dalrymple heard the natives making a lot of noise one evening. Enquiring in the morning, he was told that “Ninkenanka” had appeared the previous night. The animal was described

to him as having “the face of a horse, a neck like a giraffe, a body like a crocodile, a long tail, and being about 30ft [9m] long”. It apparently emerged from the swamps only occasionally, on moonlit nights. Several months later, Dalrymple heard of another sighting and set off immediately to look for it; unfortunately, he was driven back by mosquitoes.

LEFT: A Nile crocodile at Gambia’s sacred crocodile pool.





On a later occasion, when visiting a riverside town, Dalrymple heard a disturbance in the market. When he went to see what was causing it, he found one of his domestic staff had acquired a copy of a magazine entitled *Animals of the World*. In it was printed a picture of a concrete model dinosaur in one of New York's parks. The crowd was shouting that the white man had photographed the *Ninki-Nanka*. Sadly, Dalrymple does not describe what the dinosaur type was.

Further investigations on my part revealed the odd, passing, reference to the *Ninki-Nanka*, typically in the context of native superstitions or beliefs and usually with less than a paragraph devoted to the subject. "Plenty Bad Devil" is the pidgin English sobriquet used for the mysterious creature in more than one book.

Possibly the most interesting report that has come to light is a paper in French by Beatrice Appia which translates as "Remarks on the water genie in Guinea". This was published in the *Journal de la Société des Africanistes* at some point in the 1940s. In fact, the content of the paper was largely researched by other workers and passed to the author before she went to Africa in 1937. The study concentrates on the country to the south of the Gambia, including the Casamance region of Senegal and much of what is now the two Guineas. Different tribes seem to have different ideas of the appearance of the *Ninki-Nanka*, but most settle on a large, snake-like animal with supernatural powers rather than a sauropod-type dinosaur. Typically, it has a horn or a diamond on its head. Several of the tribes believe that the *Ninki-Nanka* is born from one egg in the middle of a clutch of python eggs.

Generally, belief in the animal is stronger near large rivers and weaker in villages farther away from them. Most people assume that the mature animal lives in the water and only comes on land on nights when there is torrential rain. Some have the immature animal living in or under a baobab tree, and only moving into the water when it attains a certain size. In some societies, to see one is either very bad luck or signifies death within days. In others, owning one – or part of one – may lead to great wealth for the owner, although it may also shorten his life. In many areas, it is not appropriate to

## Belief in the animal is stronger near large rivers

speak of it, and certainly not to visitors – which doesn't help visiting researcher at all.

**T**he existence of the *Ninki-Nanka* is very much a matter of local belief in present-day Gambia. Although tourism has altered much of the coastal region and brought in much-needed foreign currency, the culture is still, in the African sense, a multi-tribal one, with a variety of beliefs varying from animism to Christianity and Islam. I have talked to people who are firmly aware that the *Ninki-Nanka* is a myth and to others who know it isn't. One can show me a hole, not two miles from a tourist hotel where a *Ninki-Nanka* lived in the days of his father. A member of the Jola tribe whom I have known for several years, and who is a good follower of Islam, was well aware of the *Ninki-Nanka* but remarkably reluctant to talk to us about it. He also made it quite clear that we should not be talking about it.

Assan, a Wolof taxi driver of several years acquaintance, was certain that the *Ninki-Nanka* was a real animal, but believed that it was now very scarce and that only a few still existed, living upriver. A few years previously, a bridge had collapsed in the Upper River division of the country. This was, he said, the work of the *Ninki-Nanka*; one had lived in a hole near the bridge, and had been disturbed. He personally hadn't seen one, but he knew several people who had – all had gone mad as a result.

On the same visit, I met Adama Touray, a silversmith at the Kotu Beach tourist market. He was producing *Ninki-Nanka* earrings, which he had run as a line for several years. The



ABOVE: Expedition helper Bruce Walton at Bungalow Beach, scene of an alleged *Ninki-Nanka* burial.  
TOP: A *Ninki-Nanka* pendant made by Adama Touray.

CHRIS MOISER

CHRIS MOISER





LUCA SONNINO SORISIO

ABOVE: A canoeist travelling between villages in the mangrove forests around 100km (60miles) up the Gambia River.  
BELOW: A mangrove creek visited by the author.



CHRIS MOISER

following year he introduced a *Ninki-Nanka* pendant. Both lines of jewellery depicted a four legged, scaly creature, with more than a touch of the Welsh dragon about it.

At the beginning of the 21st century, the Makasuta Cultural Forest Park started to be developed. This is in an area known as Mandina Creek, which is a branch of the main Gambia River. The area was previously untouched by the locals, who considered it to be a sacred forest, full of *juju*, where the *Ninki-Nanka* lived. I had visited Mandina Creek in 1993 when researching an 1894 battle that had taken place there during the Soninke-Marabout wars. The area was remarkable because dense mangrove ran for 300–400 metres (980ft–1,300ft) between the open river and the savannah woodland. This would make an ideal habitat for an animal that did not wish to be seen, and a very easy place for humans to get lost, despite it being relatively narrow. In fairness, it could also be a place where the odd large crocodile lived; although this near to the coast the water tends to be very brackish, and not what crocodiles would like (those near the coast normally stay in freshwater pools rather than the river).

The local crocodiles in Gambia are mainly Nile crocodiles, and the local subspecies (*Crocodylus niloticus chamses*) tends not to grow more than eight to nine feet (2.4m–2.7m) long. The record size for a Nile crocodile seems to be about 21ft (6.4m) – this specimen was shot in what is now Tanzania in 1905. In a book called *Enter Gambia – birth of an improbable nation* by Berkeley Rice, published in 1967, there is a reference to a 27ft (8.2m) crocodile being caught and shot at Diabugu, in the Upper River Division, and the district officer having to use a lorry to pull the body out of the river. The incident seems to have taken place in 1964 or 1965. While a 27ft crocodile is just about possible, it

seems unlikely in this part of Africa. So it would seem – assuming the story has any basis in fact – that either a large crocodile was killed and its length exaggerated, or some unknown animal similar to a crocodile was killed.

Another, more recent, report from the Upper River Division concerned a pollution incident which killed a large number of fish and caused many stomach upsets in the local population. This occurred in July 1993 at the start of the rainy season and was reported in the *Gambian Daily Observer* on 19 July. The newspaper suggested several possible causes for the pollution, one of which was that “the decayed remains of a dragon may have been washed into the river by the heavy rains”. It appears to be more acceptable to the population to refer generally to dragons than specifically to the *Ninki-Nanka*.

The range of descriptions of the *Ninki-Nanka* across the westernmost part of Africa are clearly quite diverse, varying from a large serpent with, possibly, a precious stone on its head to an animal reminiscent of a large crocodile or a sauropod dinosaur. Such broadness of description may, of course, suggest that the name *Ninki-Nanka*, a bit like *Mokele-Mbembe* in Central Africa, is actually a generic term for a large and terrifying animal, and has taken on different meanings in different places. Alternatively, the animal may be a totally mythical one. But given the November 2004 discovery of *Homo floresiensis* – a 3ft (1m)-tall, upright walking ape that co-existed with modern man – in Indonesia, which has given us a new insight into the myths of “little people”, it’s perhaps time we looked again at other mythical beasts and beings, with a view to identifying which might be based on real animals that still exist or have existed in the past. **T**

#### FURTHER READING

B Appia, ‘Notes sur la Genie des eaux en Guinee’, *Journal de la Societe des Africanistes*, Vol XIV, 33 – 41, 1944, for details of the *Ninki-Nanka* outside the Gambia.

MDW Jeffries, ‘African Pterodactyls’, *Journal of the Royal African Society* 72 – 74, 1944. Early description of the *Ninki-Nanka* in Gambia; available on a number of Internet sites.

CM Moiser and AD Barber, ‘The Crocodile Pools of the Western Division, The Gambia’, *British Herpetological Society Bulletin* No. 47, 16 – 22, 1994, for details of the sacred crocodile pools.

K Shuker, *In Search of Prehistoric Survivors*, Blandford books, 1995, for details of the Bungalow Beach monster.

#### Author Biography



CHRIS MOISER is a former zoology lecturer who is hoping to revisit the Gambia (without a group of students in tow) to explore the Upper River Division and excavate near the Bungalow Beach hotel for whatever he can find.



# Yowieland

Following a trail that leads from Aboriginal myth to modern-day encounters, **MICHAEL WILLIAMS & RUBY LANG** set off in pursuit of one of Australia's most mysterious inhabitants – the Yowie.

It was like an elephant on two legs wearing size 20 boots." That's how Blue Mountains resident Neil Frost would later describe the ape-like creature he encountered in thick bush near his backyard to local police.

It was February 1993. The schoolteacher and father of a newborn son was loath to wake up his youngest child with a midnight trip to the toilet. Instead, he chose to sneak out the back door and relieve himself in the bush-fringed yard.

It was just as he finished his business that a large shape loomed out of the shadows, surprising him before itself taking flight.

"I'd just finished and taken one or two steps and this thing got up out of the bush and just took off," Neil recalls. It was unbelievable. It sounded big, like it weighed... I don't know... maybe 130kg [20st]. I didn't get a good look at it."

Somewhat shaken, Neil bolted next door to alert neighbour Ian 'Lizard' Price, a herpetologist and former bike gang member, who was surprised to find his normally "quiet and boring" neighbour banging on his bedroom window in the middle of the night.

"He was in a state of really extreme agitation," Ian remembers. So I said 'Let's do it'. After all, the most it could do was kill us!"

Together, the pair pursued the shape into the bush, but the creature eluded them – always just one step ahead – and began what was to become a bizarre, ongoing ritual of hide-and-seek.

Reporting the matter to local police proved a fruitless exercise; the two men later found out that local constables had carried out a door-to-door enquiry to find out if either of the pair was a known troublemaker or "doing drugs".

So, night after night, the two men would chase the creature – which would announce its presence by noisily thumping the ground – watching it flit between trees and across fire trails just beyond their reach.

In their search for the elusive man-ape, Neil and Ian also located what appeared to be full body imprints in a bed of reeds near their homes and numerous footprints, which they disregarded initially as some kind of hoax.

"I'm reasonably well versed in all of the indigenous wildlife in this country, to the extent I could identify any animal that you bring up, if not species at least genus," Ian says. "But this was strange. It was 7ft [2m] tall, two of me in build. I weigh 100kg [16st], so we're looking at a creature at least three times my body mass. It was big. It ran sort of like a person, but not quite. There was something odd in its gait.

It had a testicle-tightening growl, creating a real predator-prey type reaction. People say you shit yourself when you're really scared, but you don't. Your bum sucks in. And it could out-run us, out-see us and avoid barbed wire fences. It was a big hairy beastie."

Despite the frightening spectacle, Ian retained his sense of humour about the risks involved in chasing something so large and, presumably, dangerous. "I guess I'd be famous posthumously," he chuckles. "I said to Neil at the time: 'If it rips my arms off and stuffs them down a hole, name it after me.'"

On another occasion, Neil was lucky enough to get within a few feet of the creature after a visitor was adamant that "something had followed him down the driveway".

"I held up my torch and shone it in front of me, and this thing just stood up, leaned into me and roared into my face," Neil recalls. "Then it took off through the bush. It was pretty terrifying, but what I remember of it was that it had a large head and red eyes. It roared again, and there were dogs barking right across the valley. I remember people were coming out of their houses to tell their dogs to be quiet."



## MONSTERS OF THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

The incidents in 1993 set the scene for multiple sightings of the creature around homes in the many Blue Mountains townships along the Great

Western Highway. The road snakes its way through a massive World Heritage-listed wilderness area of some 1.03 million hectares (2.5 million acres), consisting mostly of forested landscape. It's an area that has acquired a reputation for 'high strangeness' among fortune researchers, due to a proliferation of UFO, big cat and Yowie encounters, not to mention the obligatory haunted houses dating back to the early days of colonial settlement.

"You've got all this land mass that's basically unexplored," Ian points out. Look at the Grose River Valley – no one goes there. Look at the Wollemi Pine. It's a 100ft [30m] tall tree! It can't run around and hide. If you've got a 7ft tall, 300kg creature that can hide..."

The Wollemi Pine (*Wollemia nobilis*), the so-called "dinosaur tree" thought to be long extinct, was rediscovered in 1994 by a park ranger exploring a deep, narrow canyon in the heart of the Blue Mountains. [FT79:6]

ABOVE: Yowie witness Neil Frost at the scene of his hair-raising encounter







ABOVE: Australia's Blue Mountains, home to the Wollemi Pine and, perhaps, the Yowie. BELOW: A possible Yowie print and Ian "Lizard" Price

At least 63 of Neil and Ian's neighbours have also heard or seen the bipedal creature near their own homes or in the dense, largely unexplored bush that surrounds the townships, both before and since that day in 1993. One, a nine-year-old boy living two doors away from Neil, was playing with fire one day and ran through the bush with a burning stick in his hand. "As you can imagine, that's not a very smart thing to be doing around here," says Neil, referring to the frequency of devastating bush fires in the area. "He ran smack-bang into him, literally into this creature – it looked down at him, he looked up at it, and they both ran in opposite directions, completely horrified."

"He gave a beautiful description of the creature, describing the skin folds on its face as leathery and black, with thick hair on the outside – grey with white flashes through it."

On the surface, one would have thought monster-sized primates frequenting heavily populated areas in the Australian bush would by now have been discovered, identified and named by science.

Unlike the United States, which has large mammals like bears, Australia has no animal that could be mistaken for the 'Yowie' or 'Yahoo', the Aboriginal names given to the Bigfoot-like creature chased by Neil and Ian. Nor does Australia boast any non-human primate lines, such as monkeys or great apes.

While anecdotal reports are plentiful, there is a distinct lack of credible photographic, video or audio evidence of the creature. Not one whole or partial skeleton has ever been found. And Neil's own efforts to collect samples for DNA-testing have also led nowhere. However,

he has vowed to continue his quest to prove something physical is out there.

## A small boy ran smack-bang into the creature

Bizarre plaster casts and photos of Yowie footprints that have been taken in the area show giant two, three, four and sometimes five-toed footprints, and don't look as though they could sustain a large animal's locomotion, let alone stabilise the creature.

No known species displays the same gross morphological variation that these 'Yowie feet' would suggest. They don't even look remotely primate-like.

Neither man favours the other obvious explanation for a creature that does not feature in Australia's zoological profile, can elude capture, move with lightning speed and is often reported as having glowing red eyes – that it is a creature of paranormal origin.

### TAPPING THE DREAMTIME

Struggling to find out more about his encounters, Neil eventually approached local Aborigines from the Burraborang tribe who were, initially, wary of discussing the Yowie with a white man. Eventually, after Neil shared his story, they told him what they knew of the creature from their own experiences and as it featured in their Dreamtime stories.

Described as tall, powerfully built and with arms that taper to claws, the Yowie was reputed to be a man-eater. It was also usually accompanied by an overpowering stench, an element that often crops up in many modern-day Yowie sightings. But for Neil some of the Burraborang

BOTH PHOTOS: MICHAEL WILLIAMS & RUBY LANG

people's answers merely added to the enigma.

"The Aborigines told me that they live in the trees, but I think that's just an illusion that they have. In fact what I think they meant is that they just stand *behind* trees," Neil says. There was also an Aboriginal story that Yowies have their feet on backwards. I don't believe that they do; I think what they meant, in my interpretation, is that they're just f\*\*\*ing hard to track!"

The reference to backward feet is a common one in faerie lore, and regularly crops up in Bigfoot/yeti stories from around the world. It also lends the creature a somewhat otherworldly air. But ask Neil his opinion of the phenomenon and he's adamant: "It's definitely a real creature. I don't buy into any of this paranormal stuff."

One researcher who does favour a possible paranormal explanation is veteran Australian 'monster hunter' Tony Healy. Healy, who along with colleague Paul Cropper<sup>1</sup> is working on what will be the most comprehensive book ever written on the subject of the Yowie, believes some accounts point to the creature "being something other than an anthropological or zoological mystery – that is, something other than flesh and blood. If we reject everything about the Yowie that smacks of the paranormal we'd have to sweep 20 per cent of the accumulated data under the carpet," Healy told the Sydney 2001 Myths and Monsters cryptozoology conference.<sup>2</sup>

"After 25 years on the trail, I really suspect that the American Indians, the Australian Aborigines and some of the whacked-out American researchers are right: that is, that we're dealing with shape-shifting phantoms here that will probably remain beyond human comprehension."

How else to explain the vanishing acts, glowing red eyes (in one encounter described as "the size of tennis balls"), superhuman feats of speed and the ability to invoke the so-called "nameless dread" – the inexplicable primal fear that "turns your guts to water" – experienced by so many witnesses?

"The dread", as some self-styled Yowie hunters refer to it, has stopped many individuals in their tracks and inspired a hasty retreat to the safety of cars and civilisation. It's not unlike the sort of temporary, terrifying paralysis that strikes the prey of big cats. What kind of creature could engender that kind of fear?

Two people who firmly believe that the Yowie has a paranormal origin are Jerry and Sue O'Connor, neighbours of Neil and Ian.

They favour the term "nature spirit", and given some of the paranormal attributes outlined thus far, they may yet be closest to the mark in truly describing the mysterious creature.

Their first encounter with the Yowie was in November 1999. Sue was out on the couple's back veranda late one night when the silence was broken by a spine-tingling scream.

"It was about midnight and I was just doing some painting, when suddenly there was this sound," she tells us. I don't know

what it sounded like – like something out of this world, like a cross between a lion, a bear and a monkey. It sort of growled-roared. It freaked me out; it sent shivers up my spine. So I ran inside and called for Jerry."

Initially sceptical of his wife's claims, Jerry walked out to the back veranda, explaining to Sue as he went that the noise – it being springtime – was probably just wallabies or wombats making mating sounds.

"Then this thing absolutely roared," Jerry recalls. "It was alien, and it sounded like nothing I've ever heard in my life. We didn't have a torch so we couldn't really see anything. But the feeling that came from it was like a physical barrier, like I was a threat to it. This wall of fear hit me and the hair stood up on my arms and the back of my neck. I just dragged Sue inside and shut the door. There was nothing that I was taught about in the Aussie bush that sounded like this. I never wanted to hear anything like it again, it was *that* frightening."

The couple, both in ill health, had moved to the area two years prior "for a quieter life" following Jerry's discharge from the Navy. But that encounter shattered more than the peace and quiet of one evening – like a ripple effect in a pond, it was the start of something much bigger.

### MYTH TO REALITY

"I thought that Yowies were just something we had invented because the Americans had Bigfoot," says Jerry. "That incident was the first inkling we had that there was something bizarre living in the bush around here."

Like Neil and Ian's experience, the O'Connors' encounter set the scene for a number of bizarre incidents around their home, leading them to become reluctant witnesses to a creature they had once relegated to story books.

Not knowing Neil at the time, the O'Connors got in touch with Queensland-based Dean Harrison, who runs Australian Hominid Research, a group dedicated to researching the Yowie phenomenon.<sup>3</sup> Dean put the pair in touch with Ian and Neil, who lived just

streets away, as well as passing on the story of a third man who had spotted something large, hairy and hominid on a road near the O'Connors' home – on the very same night they had experienced the spine-tingling roar.

"This bloke Brad Croft was driving along the road, which is about 500m [1,600ft] away from our house, when he saw this large, 8–9ft [2.4–2.7m] hairy man cross the road and go down into the gully," Jerry says. "He drove straight home and got Neil, who lived in the same street as him, and within 10 minutes they were back at the spot walking around. As they got down near the creek they heard it crashing around and running up a track, which, as it turns out, led straight to our backyard."

On another occasion soon afterwards, Sue was sleeping on her bed with several of her six cats when she was woken up by the sound of their collective growling: "Their hackles were up. I looked up to see why they were growling, what they were looking at, and just caught a flash of a shape in the window, about eight feet tall."



A Yowie – "The Bombala Anthropoid" – a specimen of the tribe, drawn by Will Diamond from a description given by Mr Charles Harper. The Sydney Sun, 10 Nov 1912





LEFT: Jerry and Sue O'Connor have encountered the Yowie on a number of occasions.  
BELOW: A cast from a print left on the O'Connors' property

## Their hairy visitor appeared at the bedroom window

Prior to that, the couple had regularly been woken up at night by the sound of their external fuse box cover being opened, and banging on the side of the house.

"The fuse box door would slam, but there were no kids living in the area at the time, and hardly any neighbours," Jerry recalls. "We thought that it might have been yobbos [pranksters], but something was happening every week."

A short time later Jerry, too, caught sight of their hairy visitor at the bedroom window, cementing his growing belief that something odd was afoot. "God knows how long this thing had been looking into our window," he says.

"I woke up one night and looked at the window and I saw this thing – it was like a silhouette of a human head, with a messed-up lump of hair and a nose like a human's – not like an ape with pushed-back nostrils.

"It had these massive bloody shoulders, like a gridiron player wearing shoulder pads. I was convinced then. I wasn't exactly a sceptic before, but this convinced me completely."

As the frequency of the sightings increased, the couple began to have bizarre dreams about the creature, often waking to catch sight of a hairy face peering through the window.

"I noticed we started having these nightmares. I would wake up and say to Sue, 'I've just had this frightening dream of a yowie,' and she would say: 'Really? So have I.'"

Footprints were also found on the couple's property after some of these visitations, which Jerry photographed and cast. The couple, who regularly "bush walk", have also spotted strange footprints along the fire trails and tracks that criss-cross the area, leading down into gullies, waterfalls and caves.

Despite these physical traces, they remain convinced the creature is more faerie-like than fierce physical beast.

Aboriginal lore does support the existence of 'little people'



(of a small, hairy variety) in Australia – the yuuri (pronounced 'yawri', not unlike Yowie) or 'brown jack', which fulfil a similar role to that of European elves and leprechauns, guarding certain places, granting favours and playing tricks on people.

### A CONTINUING MYSTERY

While the ongoing experiences of the Frosts, Prices and O'Connors – which we have only touched on very briefly – are confined to the Blue Mountains region, there have been numerous Yowie sightings all over

Australia, predominantly along the east coast in mountainous and forested areas.

But despite the prolific number of sightings, the occasional compelling plaster-cast of a footprint and a rich oral tradition that is thought to predate white settlement by millennia, there is as yet no concrete proof that a hitherto unknown species of man-ape walks the Australian continent.

The elusiveness of the creature, if indeed it is a flesh-and-blood being, continues to puzzle and frustrate those who have encountered it, and

those like the authors who pursue proof of its existence. It may one day be shown that the paranormal and physical aspects of the mysterious yowie are different sides of the same coin. In the meantime, failing that, all we can do is flip it and see. **FT**

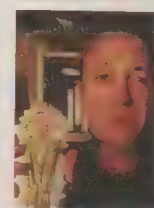
### REFERENCES

**1** Healy and Cropper also co wrote the Australian cryptozoological classic *Out Of The Shadows* (Pan Macmillan, 1994).

**2** The 2001 Myths and Monsters Conference was the first major gathering of cryptozoologists ever held in Australia. The conference, organised by Ruby Lang and Paul Cropper, featured a host of academics, amateurs and enthusiasts.

**3** Dean Harrison's AYR website [www.yowiehunters.com](http://www.yowiehunters.com) has facilitated the collection of many hominid sightings across Australia. See also **FT49:42-43, 45; FT76:40.**

### Author Biographies



Australian cryptozoologist **MICHAEL WILLIAMS** has been actively engaged in researching reports of the Yowie and Alien Big Cats around Australia for many years. He is one of the country's most active researchers, regularly travelling its length and breadth to look into reports of sightings and analysing video footage, tracks and photographs, and is regularly quoted in the media. He considers himself an idiot savant with no savantlike qualities.



**RUBY LANG** is a journalist and author with an all-consuming interest in things cryptozoological. She runs the Australian foran site [www.strangenation.com.au](http://www.strangenation.com.au) and has been writing and actively investigating strange phenomena for several years. Ruby staged the Myths & Monsters 2001: Australian Cryptozoology Conference in Sydney with author Paul Cropper, which brought together the cream of Australia's cryptozoological crop for the first time. Occasionally, after several beers, the pair threaten to do it all again.

ALL PHOTOS: MICHAEL WILLIAMS & RUBY LANG

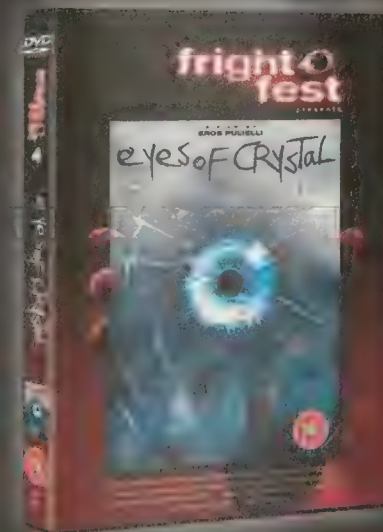
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# What Lies Beneath?

A picturesque Alpine lake isn't the sort of place you'd expect to find a monster, but legends, rumours and a number of sightings suggest otherwise. **ULRICH MAGIN** travelled to Italy to see if a real monster lurked in the mythological landscape of Italy's Lake Maggiore.

Standing on the top of Mount Mottarone, you hear nothing – just the wind and the tolling bells of the sheep. Looking around, you see the grandeur of the Italian Alps: Monte Rosa looms in the west, its sharp peak covered with ice; and in the east, you see a long and winding lake which stretches from the northern end in Switzerland to the southern horizon near Milan. Lago Maggiore, the great lake, is deep blue, dotted with white yachts and ferryboats, and seems almost endless. Below you is the Bay of Borromee, with three islands turned into lush gardens (one built in the form of a step pyramid), and the nature reserve at the mouth of the Toce river. The famous resort of Stresa lines the shore, then comes Baveno – less elegant, but boasting a granite statue of a 100ft (30m) sea serpent.

A statue of a sea serpent? Although Italy's second largest lake, with its palm trees and neo-classical villas, hardly looks like the kind of remote spot one would expect to find surviving plesiosaurs, the lake monster of Lago Maggiore is well known in cryptozoological circles, mainly through a reference in Peter Costello's classic book *In Search of Lake Monsters*: "[I]n the Italian Alps Lake Maggiore is the reputed haunt of a monster. In 1934, fishermen reported they had seen it where the River Ticino runs into the lake. It was not however dreamed up just to cash in on the fashion for monsters, because this particular monster – said to have a horse's head and to live on fish – was mentioned at the beginning of the 19th century in one of his travel books by

the novelist Stendhal."<sup>1</sup> The quote by Stendhal – who wrote extensively on Lake Maggiore – has not yet been traced and probably does not exist. As for the lake being the creature's "reputed haunt", my own experience indicates that people around the lake are not aware of any monster, and that it is mainly tourists who see and report it. Also, strange as it seems, no Italian or Swiss source (the point where the Ticino joins the lake is actually in Switzerland) for the incident mentioned by Costello has yet been found.<sup>2</sup>

Lago Maggiore is a large lake (65km [40 miles] long, 5km [3 miles] wide, and 372m [1,220ft] deep), and it was once even larger: sediment deposited by the river Maggia filled a whole bay during the Middle Ages, and now parts of the city of Lugano stand on this old sea bed. Also, in Italy, the River Toce has such a broad delta that it managed to cut off a portion of the lake, forming what is now the independent Lago di Mergozzo. And in prehistory, Lake Maggiore even reached far north into the Ticino valley.

One might ask why, given that so much of the former lakebed is now dry land – and if the present lake

contains a large unknown creature – no remains have ever been found during house construction. Actually, in the spring of 1934, the *Giornale del Ticino*<sup>3</sup> reported that an 8m (26ft) bone had been discovered at Cannobbio in Switzerland, high above



ABOVE: Author and explorer Schencher meets – possibly a *tatzelwurm* – in the Swiss Alps. Taken from his *Routes In The Swiss Alps* (Leyden, 1702–11).  
OPPOSITE: Artist's impression of the Lago Maggiore monster.





the shore. The paper referred to the “monster fashion” of the time, and this may – or may not – have been the source for the strange story quoted by Costello. It was, incidentally, a fossil bone from a large mammal.

## RUMOURS OF EXISTENCE

Before the 1934 report, we have only vague tales of dragons and the occasional sighting of that archetypal Alpen monster, the tazelwurm (for example, at Ronco in 1811). In the 19th century, a church at Varèse exhibited a crocodile that was said to have been caught, either in the lake or on the mountains, in the Swiss part of the Lago Maggiore region, but it is generally assumed that this is only a folktale that attached itself on a crocodile imported from Africa.

The first sighting of a monster in Lake Maggiore, and the only pre-1934 report I have been able to find, dates to the 1900s, but was not reported (and then without a source) until August 2003 by Dino Erzei in his column on the supernatural in the local Internet newspaper *Il Territorio*.<sup>4</sup>

Erzei claims that the lower Lake Maggiore (in contrast to Costello's report, which refers to the northern part) was reputed to be the haunt of a monster in the early 20th century. Fishermen noted that their nets were torn and empty in the evening, and that the way the nets had been damaged indicated a large and fierce creature. One evening, a Meina fisherman was attacked in his boat by a giant beast which hit the craft so hard it almost capsized. The man took his oar and fought it off (in an earlier enactment of a similar drama reported at Loch Morar in 1969). Several months later, in winter, a boat carrying workers from Angera and Taino to the factories on the opposite shore vanished without a trace on a foggy day – a loss for which the monster was blamed.

Unfortunately, this vague tale can't be checked, so it is hoped that some enterprising *FT* reader from Italy will endeavour to find local sources (at least, perhaps, for the missing boat) from local press accounts.

We have to wait until 1948 to find a new report, albeit of a somewhat smaller creature. As reported in the Como weekly *L'Ordine* on 23 June 1948, “a strange fish with a big head, dirty green eyes and many bow-shaped spikes on its back” had been caught in the lake. It was only 80cm (32in) long, so this “strange fish” may well have been of a species already described by Pliny the Elder as inhabiting Lake Como and Lago Maggiore (*Natural History* 9, 69), and which was identified by the great German encyclopædist Zedler in the 18th century as a species of carp. At about the same time, a well-known local storyteller from the Swiss part of the lake, one

# A giant pike had towed his boat through the fog

Centin of Locarno, told a tall tale about a gigantic pike which had towed his boat through the fog for hours.<sup>5</sup>

We encounter the Ticino River again in 1963, but this time in Italy, where it leaves Lake Maggiore to flow mightily towards the Po. About five kilometres (three miles) into the river, at Golasecca, an unnamed witness observed “a large and mysterious animal.”<sup>6</sup>

## MODERN MONSTERS

Until quite recently, these were all the references we possessed for an unknown creature in the lake (apart from a brief reference in October 1988 in the Swiss paper *Glärner Nachrichten* about “monstrous fish caught in the lake” – they were later identified as catfish), but the situation changed drastically in 2003 when the discussion board of the German web site Einsamer Schütze gave references to four sightings around the lake, all reported by participants. Unfortunately, none of them could be investigated due to the anonymous nature of such postings.

On a thread asking whether participants had ever seen a cryptozoological entity, someone calling herself ‘Ntschotschi’ posted that the previous year she, along with her husband and children, had been staying at a bay when “in the centre of the lake a large back appeared, dived, and reappeared two further times. Long after the hump had vanished, one could see gigantic waves. I have seen whales off Corse, and this animal was at least as long, four to five metres (13–16ft).” To which a certain ‘NoName’ replied that “two or three years ago [which would make it 2000 or 2001], I observed the same. I now think it was only a boat's wake.” To which ‘Marion’ responded that in about 1990, her uncle and his family had seen something large and monstrous passing close to their boat. Her cousin, six years old at the time, had become hysterical. The animal was half submerged, very fast and very large, but it swam silently. It did not appear to be fish-shaped, but did seem to display something that might have been a neck; whether

this indicated a classic plesiosaur outline Marion could not say. The colour was reported as greeny-brown, and the creature had no scales. One last poster said that he had seen similar things in Lake Maggiore, but also in Lake Geneva and in Lake Zurich. These, he said, were so-called seiche phenomena. What he meant, I think, was reflected boat wakes, as seiches – large, slow movements within the body of a lake – are invisible to the eye. It was a fair comment; reflected boat wakes could well explain all of these stories; except, that is, the one of Marion's uncle.

It should be added that Lake Maggiore, for a brief time, actually had two distinctly out-of-place residents. On 13 July 1994, two sea lions escaped from a circus based at Ascona, Switzerland. One of them, Otto, was caught on 18 July, but Cæsar remained free until 20 July, when he came ashore, quite exhausted, in Golasecca (which means he had swum the entire length of the lake!).<sup>7</sup> Marion's vague description could just as well refer to one of these errant sea lions – although as she could not remember the date, we



ABOVE: The picturesque but not noticeably monster-ridden northern end of Lago Maggiore in Switzerland. OPPOSITE: Baveno's 'Maggi' statue.

will never know for sure.

Another surprising resident – a caiman reported to be living in the lake, near Fondotoce, in June 2000 – turned out to be merely a rumour; policemen had raided an illegal crocodile farm, and the story circulated amongst the locals that one of the creatures had escaped. As far as I'm aware, no actual sightings were reported.<sup>8</sup>

And then, a submerged, torpedo-shaped UFO might look rather like a lake monster. Actually, one famous UFO incident from Jacques Vallée's *Passport to Magonia* catalogue tells of two helmet-shaped flying saucers seen hovering over the lake's surface at Intra Harbour in December 1962 (the actual day given varies from source to source) and then disappearing into the sky.<sup>9</sup> And on 22 July 1977, Achille L and Mario B claimed they had observed “a gigantic disc” close to Angera, which approached the ground, then slid into the waters of the lake.<sup>10</sup>

## A MYTHOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE

In fact, Lake Maggiore is a perfect illustration of the ‘mythological landscape’ described by Michel Meurger in his seminal book *Lake Monster Traditions*<sup>11</sup> – a lake rumoured to harbour monsters, some like big fish, others like plesiosaurs, still others like crocodiles, and haunted by UFOs (they have often been encountered here, and some Italian ufologists have even suggested that the depths of the lake hide an alien base). Even Apollonios Rhodios, in his *Argonautika*, has Phæton, the son of Helios the Sun god, fall into a lake that lies somewhere along the Eridanos – the modern Po – suggesting that similar stories might date far back into prehistory. And folklore tells us that underground tunnels link all of the large Italian lakes.

It is difficult to assemble an identikit picture of the mysterious denizen of Lago Maggiore: is it a big fish? Something like a plesiosaur? Or is it a sub-aquatic UFO created by an alien race?

The sea serpent statue of Baveno (opposite page), by the way, is just a “fairy tale dragon”, as Fabrizio Bianchetti of the Baveno Tourist Office explained to me in an October 2003 letter. He, for one – and despite being an expert on the city of Baveno – was not aware of the lake's fabled inhabitant.

Sitting on a bench at Pallanza in the warm September sun, looking at the waters of the great lake, I saw a low, long hump slowly worming its way across the Bay of Borromee. A second hump followed, then another.

I knew what these humps were – the wake of a ferry that had passed almost 20 minutes earlier. When the “Monster of Lake Maggiore” becomes better known, in Italy and even further afield, I've no doubt tourists and monster-hunters will see these wakes and report encounters with giant serpents. Similar reports already come from other Upper Italian lakes, such as Orta, Como, Iseo, and Garda, as well as the Adda, Oglio, Adige and Po Rivers. Only Lake Como, though, surpasses Maggiore in the number and quality of its anecdotal sightings.

The monster of Lago Maggiore is a strange beast. Completely unknown to those who live beside the lake, it has no definite form but appears to each witness in a different guise. Why is it not seen more often by the millions of tourists who crowd the lake? Why have no remains been found in those parts of the prehistoric lake that are now dry land, and where new houses are being built even now?

And then, what do the witnesses see? Reflected boat wakes? The occasional large sturgeon or catfish? Does something dark really lurk in the deep waters of Maggiore, or is it simply that we still need monsters, which – like those on the old maps – fill the gaps where human knowledge cannot penetrate? **FT**

## NOTES

- 1 Peter Costello, *In Search of Lake Monsters*, Panther, 1975, p 320.
- 2 Stendhal mentions Lago Maggiore prominently in two of his books, the famous novel *La chartreuse de Parme* and in his travel diary *Rome, Naples and Florence in the year 1817*. There is no reference to a monster in either.
- 3 *Giornale del Ticino*, Spring 1934. I owe this information to Andreas Trottmann.
- 4 Dino Erzei, “I mostri di Loch Maggiore”, *Il Territorio*, Aug 2003.
- 5 A Leoni, “Le incredibili storie del Centino”, *Orselina* 2003 p 11 (a tourist newspaper).
- 6 Umberto Cordier, *Guida ai draghi e mostri in Italia*, SugarCo, Mailand, 1986, p 86.
- 7 *Rheinische Post*, 22 July 1994; *Ludwigsburger Kreiszeitung*, 18 Jul 1994.
- 8 Maurizio Tortorella, “Nuove leggende urbane”, *Panorama*, 29 Jun 2001, (Claims a cayman was seen in the lake; the original newspaper reports (*Il Giorno*, 2 + 4 Jun 2000; *Corriere della Sera*, 3 Jun 2000) have the different version cited above.
- 9 Jacques Vallée, *Passport to Magonia*, Henry Regnery, Chicago, 1969, p 289.
- 10 [http://digilander.libero.it/vareseufo/Pagine\\_sito/Annali/Pagina\\_76-80.htm](http://digilander.libero.it/vareseufo/Pagine_sito/Annali/Pagina_76-80.htm)?
- 11 Michel Meurger w. Claude Gagnon, *Lake Monster Traditions*, Fortean Times, 1988.

## Author Biographies



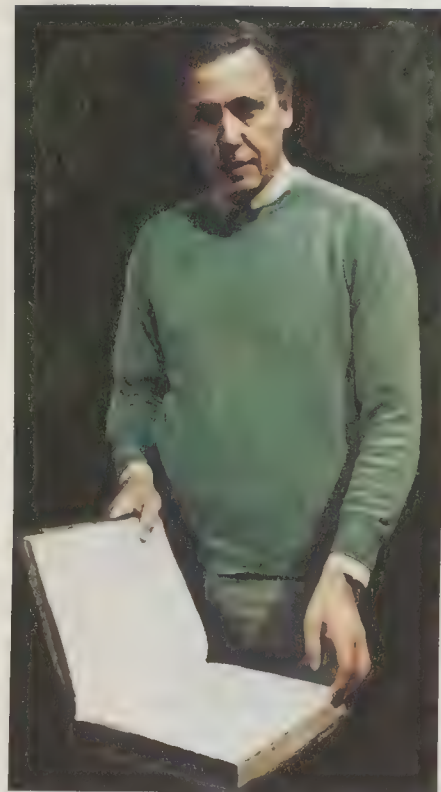
ULRICH MAGIN lives with his three budgies in the Black Forest. He has contributed to many fortan magazines and hopes to see a lake monster sooner or later.



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# Attenborough's Fabulous Animals



With its Pythonesque, illuminated manuscript title sequence and blaring trumpet theme, one might be forgiven for thinking that Terry Gilliam had a hand in creating the BBC's *Fabulous Animals* series. Aimed at the under-11s as half-term viewing fodder, the series featured an earnest and still youthful-looking David Attenborough zipping through a panoply of monster stories covering everything from mammoths locked in ice to Bigfoot. For each episode, a largely studio-bound Attenborough inhabited a set resembling the back room of a museum. The desks and tables were littered with worse-for-wear antiquarian books on monsters from Attenborough's own collection and a variety of plastic dinosaurs, creating the illusion that this was Attenborough's own study, or a close facsimile thereof. It was an illusion that foundered somewhat when, *inter alia*, the set gained a tank of live eels or was decorated with *Battle for the Planet of the Apes* and *Dr Who* and the *Daleks* movie posters in order to illustrate whatever point the man we would have given our right arms to have as our science teacher was making.

MARTIN GATELY beards in its lair the long-unseen BBC TV documentary on strange and mythological beasts that fired the imagination of junior cryptozoologists back in 1975.



## EPISODE GUIDE

### 1 Here be Monsters

Topics include the discovery by Belgian colliers of 30 complete *Iguanodon* skeletons, the 1901 expedition to Northern Siberia to find frozen mammoths and the search for the giant ground sloth of Patagonia.

**Highlight:** Attenborough doesn't dismiss the possibility of an "elephants' graveyard" nor does he rule out the survival of mammoths in Siberia.



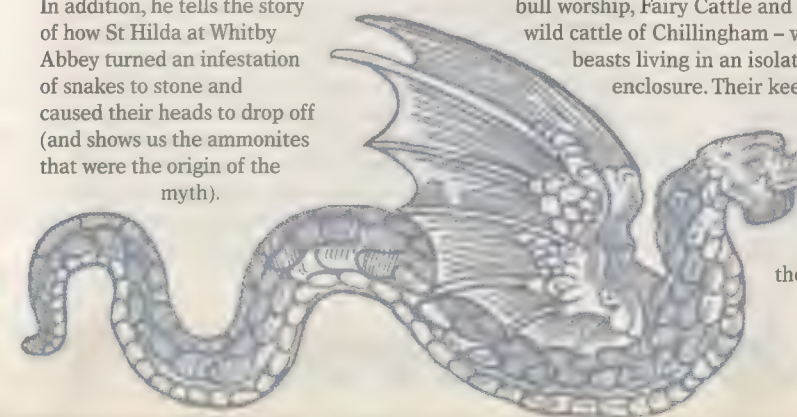
### 2 Mermaids and other Marvels of the Sea

Attenborough tells in detail the story of the church-attending Mermaid of Zennor in Cornwall and touches on the giant squid, the Gloucester Sea Serpent, the *HMS Daedalus* sea serpent sighting and the Loch Ness Monster.

**Highlight:** Attenborough points out that the life cycle of the eel was not understood until the 1920s; in 1933, George Spicer and his wife saw the "Loch Ness monster" cross a road and plunge into the loch – could this have been a gigantic eel travelling across land just as ordinary eels do during the "eel fair?"

### 3 Dragons and Serpents

Attenborough introduces rare footage of the flying lizard of Borneo and the Paradise tree snake (which also flies, rather alarmingly). In addition, he tells the story of how St Hilda at Whitby Abbey turned an infestation of snakes to stone and caused their heads to drop off (and shows us the ammonites that were the origin of the myth).



**Highlight:** Footage of Attenborough's 1956 journey to Komodo to trap a Komodo Dragon. Three blokes in a jungle try to trap a hungry and irritable ten-foot- (3m-) long reptile in a makeshift cage made from tree branches. This could be the nearest to *Jurassic Park* that anyone has ever got.

**Highlight:** Attenborough wonders if the origins of the unicorn myth lie in a "simple" operation to transfer a horn bud to the forehead of an animal, as practised by ancient peoples unknown.

### 6 Man or Beast

Attenborough explains that early reports of baboons indicated that they were partly human and could read and write! He believes that the entry in his antiquarian monster encyclopædia for a dog-faced man was probably inspired by the Indris giant lemur.

**Highlight:** Footage of Roger Patterson being interviewed, followed by his famous Bigfoot film sequence. Showing an uncharacteristic cynicism, Attenborough concludes that Patterson was the victim of a hoax. However, the yeti is a different matter: we are assured that a real unknown animal is the cause of these reports – it's definitely *not* a hoax.

The *Fabulous Animals* series has not been broadcast since the 1970s and has never been available on commercial video or DVD. However, small groups of cryptozoology students have been known to gather in silent reverence when ancient, snowy, off-air copies are shown around a mate's house.

The series was accompanied by a book, which you have a slim chance of obtaining via e-Bay or obsessive visits to your local charity shop.



### Author Biography



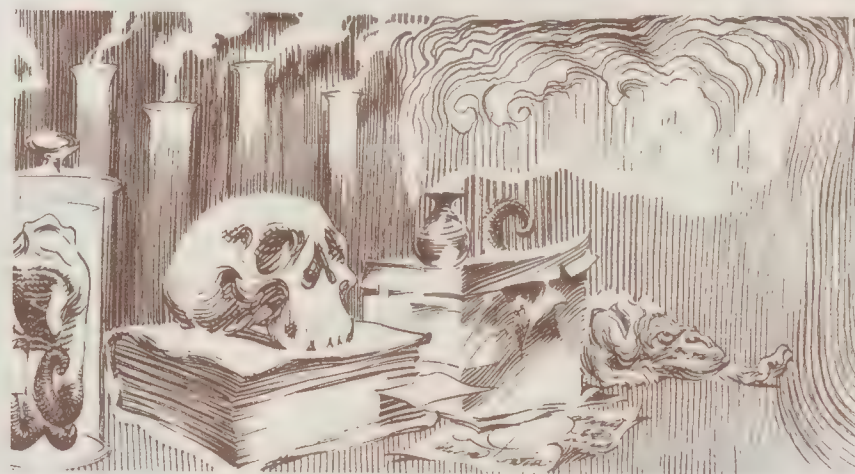
MARTIN GATELY is a sometime writer of comic strips and articles about cult television who wants to know what he has done to deserve a job in local government.



# The Fortean Times

## Random Dictionary of the Damned

compiled by the Hierophant's Apprentice



### No 11: X-RAY VISIONARIES

Apparently, one night in the mid-Sixties, the lovely Jane Asher (Paul McCartney's then squeeze, and still the Apprentices' fave amongst the Fab One's paramours), decided to stay the night in Bristol, where she was engaged in some thespian enterprise. The always-wholesome Macca was so incensed at her eschewing the delights of his incomparable society that he sat down to write a song to slag the ungrateful harpie off good and proper. The number, 'I'm Looking Through You', appeared on the Beatles' 1965 album *Rubber Soul*. In it, McCartney expanded on a common figure of speech, managing to suggest not only that he had the exquisite acuity to see right through the insincerities/pretensions/foibles/ social veneer/devious machinations/et cetera of the object of his spite, but that beneath them lay an un-lumbed infinitude of airy vacancy. Twice over is the unfortunate, and undeserving, Jane Asher condemned.

After all these years and an abundance of other evidence, it's probably fair to conclude that the song tells us rather more about the depths of Paul McCartney than it does about the transparency of the still altogether engaging Ms Asher.

Being able to "see through" other people's façades is a talent some are blessed with more than others. Most of us manage the feat too late and – as we contemplate the crumbling engine block of the pristine Mk II Jag we bought for a song or the sepulchral echoes of the mysteriously emptied joint bank account – are left with the strange sinking feeling that goes with realising, yet again, that we have failed to disbelieve the most hackneyed of unlikely stories. But a few rare individuals can apparently go further than divining the dodginess lying behind the smooth and plausible exterior of their fellow men: they can see through human flesh, and any raiment that may be adorning it, to the palpitating organs within.

One such was Kuda Bux, also known as Koda Box (FT25:32). Born Khudah Bukhsh in Kashmir in 1906, he settled in due

course in New York (where he died in 1981). During the 1930s and '40s, he toured the civilised world demonstrating his ability to "see" while elaborately blindfolded. In 1937, he reportedly astonished the inhabitants of Liverpool, England, by walking blindfold along a roof ledge 200 feet (60m) above the ground. In 1945, with his eyes taped shut, he negotiated New York's bustling Times Square traffic on a bicycle. Various researchers (presumably including a few scientists) examined him over the years and were suitably impressed. Vincent J Daczynski<sup>1</sup> saw him perform in 1958 in New York, and describes how Bux's eyes were covered first with 6in (15cm) "patties" of fresh dough. Next, cotton pads, 4in by 6in (10cm by 15cm), were placed vertically over the patties and taped to his face. Over those were tied strips of black cloth, which audience members verified were entirely opaque. Over all this went a black bag, also opaque, which was tied tightly around his neck. "Breathing was obviously difficult, and seeing with his physical eyes was impossible," remarks Daczynski of this four-layer trifle.

What followed was, by stage magicians' standards, fairly tame at first. Mrs Bux fished balloons from a box, and Mr Bux correctly named their colours. He did the same when members of the audience extracted balloons. Then he asked if anyone present happened to have a book about his or her person. Lo and behold, someone did, and Bux accurately read out passages apparently selected at random.

"Finally," [writes Daczynski] "Kuda Bux performed the *coup de grâce* [i.e. *pièce de résistance*]. 'Would anyone like to come up and write something on the blackboard,' Kuda Bux asked. One person came up and wrote, 'Can you read this?' Kuda Bux smiled. 'Yes,' he said. He took his chalk and precisely traced over the script written on the blackboard. The next person wrote a brief sentence below the previous one, and Kuda Bux again traced perfectly over that one as well. While tracing he noticed that the letter 'i' was not dotted. He dotted it saying,



KUDA BUX: WANTED TO INFORM PEOPLE OF THEIR HIDDEN WILD TALENTS

'You forgot to dot the "i".'

"Continuing playfully, Kuda Bux asked, 'Can anyone write something in a foreign language?' A woman appearing to be from the Middle East stepped forward and wrote in Arabic. Kuda Bux then unhesitatingly traced exactly over each chalk mark, going from left to right, then repeating the tracing from right to left. This concluded Kuda Bux's demonstration."

It also convinced Daczynski that Bux was not pulling any fast ones. Others may be less convinced – but Bux did not charge for these demonstrations. His talent, he said, was developed through decades of intense yoga practice. His wife explained that her husband "was financially self-sufficient and provided his demonstrations free to the general public in lecture halls which he rented. The purpose of these meetings was to inform people that they had a far greater potential and range of faculties than they realised." Bux remains something of an enigma, then, even if one discounts his claims and his stated motives.

There seems no reason to question the motives of doctors who claim to have X-ray vision. The name of Zheng Xiangling (FT52: 14, 57:27) first surfaced in the West in 1988, when she was 24. A doctor who, it was reported, then worked at the General Staff headquarters of the People's Liberation Army in Peking, Miss Zheng could apparently see her patients' bones, veins and internal organs in three dimensions and full colour – and could presumably see anyone else's as well, when and if she chose, which might have made standing in a bus queue an unnerving experience for her. Her ability was not limited to human flesh: for instance, she could read words written – out of her sight – on paper that was then tightly folded several times. Curiously, she was also said to be able to will goldfish to die.

In her life-saving role, Miss Zheng usually diagnosed her patients, who remained fully clothed, in the dark. She was

particularly good at detecting cancers, heart disease, arthritis and respiratory problems with, it was said, greater accuracy than standard hospital equipment. The process, however, was exhausting, and she saw patients only twice a week – and they, according to her friends, were a veritable "Who's Who of the Chinese leadership".

The first sign of her unusual powers came when she was aged four, when she discerned glowing auras around people. Within two years, she was accurately predicting the sex of children carried by her pregnant relatives. Her brother, too, reportedly had similar powers, and the police allegedly used him to spy on suspected criminals – by looking through the walls of their houses.

Much water has passed – and been passed – under China's political bridges since the late 1980s, and one can only speculate why there seems to be no trace of Miss Zheng today. Whatever the fate of individuals, the Chinese government has long maintained an interest in psychic talents, and makes no secret of funding research into most branches of extra-sensory perception, including "X-ray vision", particularly among children.

According to Thomas E Rafill, co-author with Paul Dong of *China's Super Psychics* (Marlowe, 1997), "a popular research target" in the 1990s in China was "see-through vision". As Rafill explains it:

"This has a good application as a tool for medical diagnosis. Xinjiang People's Liberation Army Hospital did 117 tests of children's abilities to perform such medical diagnoses. In 22 cases of examining for diseases in the head, the children were correct 17 times, partly correct four times and wrong one time. In 53 cases examining the liver, the results

were: 43 correct, five partly correct, four wrong, and one couldn't see clearly. In 19 trials of viewing foetal position, they were correct 16 times and wrong three times. These results were reported in 'Preliminary Investigation of Modern Medical Verification of EHF' by Yang Junpeng, assistant director of the hospital."

This all sounds very promising – as long as one doesn't ask exactly what were the protocols of the investigations, and how were they conducted? Not to mention picky details such as: how many children were involved in each trial, and what were their individual results?

There appears to be a long association in China between psychic ability and the *chi gong* (or *qigong*) school of meditative training, which involves a regime of breathing exercises to control the *chi* (qi), or "life-energy" as it flows through the body.<sup>2</sup> Adepts say their X-ray vision is two-dimensional and limited to black-and-white imagery. Rafill reports that toward the end of the 1990s, "psychic research became a center of controversy, as many masters of *chi gong* meditation promoted their practices as a path to mysterious spiritual powers. The Chinese government took a negative view of some of these activities, especially those that rejected the use of conventional medicine... However, psychic research in a scientific framework has continued to receive the support of the Chinese government."

One might wonder why. It was always a curiosity of Marxist régimes that they tolerated (encouraged, even) belief in phenomena that shouldn't exist according to the tenets of dialectical materialism, while slaughtering and torturing those who wanted to do nothing more wicked than read Pasternak or become a Jehovah's Witness. Some in the West would say that the quest for proof of ESP or alien visitation is essentially a religious one, albeit dressed in the false moustaches and seductively plain apparel of the average lab technician. Perhaps the Red régimes



thought so too, and reckoned that promoting a modicum of psychic hoopla was a more useful, and manageable, opiate for the people than the irritatingly independent incense-swinging classes would provide. Besides, it was a great way to wind up the CIA and make them waste a whole pile of time and money.

In any case, the Reds in Russia were no less keen than the Chinese to suggest that they had the world's best weirdness in train, and the capitalists had better watch out. So, in the late 1980s we heard of Mrs Yuliya Vorobyeva [FT49:8]. In March 1978, the story went, this then-37-year-old crane driver was working in a mine near Donetsk in the Ukraine when she ran into an electricity line and received a massive jolt of 380-volts. She was pronounced dead, and lay in the local mortuary for two days before a *post mortem* was held. But no sooner had scalpel sliced skin than the "corpse" began to bleed – and to shake uncontrollably. After that uncomfortable awakening, Mrs Vorobyeva did not sleep for six months. (Well, would you?) Finally, she succumbed to a long, deep sleep – which refreshed her in an extraordinary way.

"One morning," she told the newspaper *Izvestia* in June 1987, "I went out to buy bread. I got to the bus stop and a woman was standing there. I went up to her and suddenly I was paralysed with horror. I could see her intestines and straight through her as if she were a picture on a television set."

Investigated (allegedly) by a Dr Yeizhertin at Donetsk hospital, she told him within seconds of their meeting that – again, allegedly, correctly – his hearing was better in one ear than the other, and that his left eye was stronger than his right. She informed the reporter from *Izvestia* that he had a red liquid in his stomach – sounds alarming, but he had eaten a jelly shortly before. Mrs Vorobyeva went on to specialise in diagnosing rare diseases. Like China's Dr Zheng, no one seems to have heard of her since the initial newspaper reports which, given the nature of her talent, seems more than a little strange. After all, according to a quote ascribed to doctors at Donetsk, she "never made a single mistake".

The same claim has been made of Natasha (or Natalia) Demkina, who comes from Saransk, Russia (FT182:4-5, 194:15). Miss Demkina's career, however, has thrived since the collapse of the Soviet empire, and she – currently in her late teens – is definitely not a fleeting fad (or, dare we say it, invention) of some state organ of propaganda and public bewilderment. Since her appearance on a Discovery Channel programme, showing her talents being tested in May 2004 by British and American scientists, she has become something of a *cause célèbre* among those with a touching faith in the wickedness of the scientific method and the mendacity of the subtler reaches of statistics. But first let's see what Natasha's mother claims she does. She told Monica Garnsey, director and producer of the programme:

"Since the age of 10, a few days after having a religious dream, and also having had an operation to have her appendix removed

that went wrong, swabs were left in her and she had to have another operation, Natasha has claimed to be able to see into people... Natasha can see through clothing, but not see what someone is holding behind their back. She cannot see inside people if she shuts her eyes. Daylight is better. She does not need to talk to them to diagnose. She can also diagnose from a photograph. She usually scans people all over first, by making them stand up fully clothed and looking them up and down; delivers a general diagnosis; and then goes into more detail when the patients have discussed their concerns with her. She says she can certainly see ribs, heart, lungs, initially in general "like in an anatomy book", but can see right down to the cell level if she concentrates. She says that she can examine the whole body,

but it can give her a bad headache if she does too much. The idea of restricting the test to the chest area appeals [to her], though her claims extend further than that."<sup>3</sup>

And her mum said Natasha had never made a mistake in diagnosing the thousands of people who have come to her, at \$13 a shot, over the last seven years or so.

That may be so in Russia, but we have to note that when, on live TV in the UK, Natasha 'diagnosed' Dr Christopher Steele, she said she saw something wrong with his gall bladder and that he had kidney stones and an enlarged liver and pancreas. (That seems to us to be an awful lot for a doctor not to have noticed going wonky in his very own personal body, but still.) "The physician rushed off to have a battery of expensive and invasive clinical tests – which found nothing wrong with him," veteran medical journalist Andrew A Skolnick revealed later. "In addition to being exposed to unnecessary diagnostic radiation, he had a colonoscopy, which is not

without risks. Studies have found that 0.2 per cent (two tenths of one per cent) or more of patients who undergo colonoscopic screening suffer a bowel perforation, which can lead to life-threatening infection and the need for surgery."<sup>4</sup>

The uproar that followed the tests, devised by Prof. Richard Wiseman, Prof. Ray Hyman and Skolnick, centred on the testers' response to the number of correct diagnoses Natasha had made. As this amounted to four out of seven possible 'hits', it seemed unreasonable for them to conclude that no paranormal issues were involved and that they felt Ms Demkina's talent did not merit further investigation. That Wiseman and Hyman were fellows of CSICOP only fuelled the semi-conspiracy theory that the researchers were determined to come to negative conclusions and had rigged not only the interpretation of the results but the tests themselves.

Much as we love a conspiracy theory, this is unfair. As Monica Garnsey's note quoted above makes clear, Natasha normally starts with a "cold" reading, and claims to be able to "see" down to the cellular level. In this case, she *knew what*

conditions she had to look for – and had subjects who matched those conditions – which made her task much simpler than usual. The researchers had set a score of 5/7 correct diagnoses as indicative that something more than chance was at work in Natasha's assessments, and arbitrarily assigned odds of 99:1 against there being a paranormal explanation. As Hyman remarked, many would have set these odds far higher. There isn't space to

elaborate here on the full statistical reasoning.<sup>5</sup> But, by using a straightforward calculation of odds, plus a Bayesian analysis of the outcome of the tests, Hyman and his colleagues calculated that the 5/7 score would mean that the odds were about even between the null hypothesis (nothing paranormal at work) and the alternative. That would indicate that *something* unconventional was at work, deserving further research. Natasha's actual result of 4/7 correct diagnoses left the odds at 9:1 in favour of the null hypothesis. This was *not*, therefore, a case of "Natasha scoring at over three times the level of chance statistical probability" as one febrile critic imagined.<sup>6</sup> Therefore the researchers felt that further investigation wasn't warranted. To their irritation, the TV programme did not make this plain, and presented their finding as "disproving" Natasha's claims, which they freely admit it did not do. They do, however (see the articles cited) discuss the various ways in which, without being dishonest, Natasha may arrive at plausible diagnoses without using "X-ray vision". Apart from the splutterings of the usual suspects, for whom no one associated with CSICOP can ever do anything right, the clucking and squawking of the experiment's critics seems largely to be based on a failure to grasp its statistical framework. Both sides of the argument should take some comfort from Miss Demkina's decision to study conventional medicine.

We started this article with an obscure bit of rock music history, so we'll end that way.

Untrammelled by the attentions of sceptics, rock legend Ronnie Hawkins<sup>7</sup> believes that a 16-year-old Canadian lad cured him of terminal pancreatic cancer in 2003. According to the *Toronto Globe and Mail*,<sup>8</sup> the healer, known only as "Adam", is "tall and handsome, with short, brown hair and a trace of dark fluff on his

upper lip" who "looks like a typical 16-year-old" and is "a sporty guy who snowboards and plays basketball. In his spare time, he lifts weights, listens to alternative rock music and hangs out with his girlfriend".

Like most X-ray visionaries, "Adam" has no medical training – when would he have found the time? – but "can see a heart beating within a chest, or pop cancer cells inside people on the other side of the planet as effortlessly as most kids squeeze a pimple". He "cured" Hawkins by gazing at a photograph of the ageing rocker.

"What I see when I go into someone is a 3-D holographic image," he told the *Toronto paper*. "I can see energy blockages, the problems, whatever. It looks like a 3-D image of the body, with different layers. I can see a physical layer: the heart beating, guts moving, that sort of stuff. Then there's a layer that's just like a hollow image of the person and there are green dots where there are problems – or green bulges, depending on the problem." Then he waves his arms about

and directs "energy" at the diseased cells to "pop" them.

"Adam", who refers to himself these days as "Dreamhealer", charged \$75 a pop (or treatment) in 2003. He discovered his talent when he cured his mother of multiple sclerosis (a disease notorious for intermittent remissions, by the way). It is not known what he charges today, or what he charged Ronnie Hawkins. Hawkins, at any rate, was claiming to be still alive as this was written. As, indeed, are claims of X-ray vision. **7**



RONNIE HAWKINS: CURED VIA HIS PHOTOGRAPH

## NOTES

1 See Vincent J Daczynski, *Amazing Human Abilities*, a free online book at [www.amazingabilities.com](http://www.amazingabilities.com) (posted 2004).

2 *Chi* or *qi* is "difficult of definition in any sort of everyday or scientific terms: it is at once 'breath', spirit, non-muscular energy, or 'inner power'. It is that energy which flows along the acupuncture meridians. It is also the energy developed by practitioners of the 'Internal schools' of the martial arts, the most well-known of which is 'Tai Chi Chuan.'" – Steve Moore, **FT27:20**.

3 Quoted in Ray Hyman, "Testing Natasha" (2005), [www.csicop.org/specialarticles/natasha.html](http://www.csicop.org/specialarticles/natasha.html). For the conventional legend of Natasha Demkina, and her semi-miraculous

childhood, see *Pravda*, 14 Jan 2004, [http://english.pravda.ru/science/19/94/377/11797\\_phenomenon.html](http://english.pravda.ru/science/19/94/377/11797_phenomenon.html).

4 Andrew A Skolnick, "Natasha Demkina: the girl with ordinary eyes" (2005), [www.csicop.org/specialarticles/demkina.html](http://www.csicop.org/specialarticles/demkina.html). Miss Demkina also managed a thoroughly inaccurate diagnosis of Mr Skolnick's general and specific states of health.

5 Those interested in the subtleties should read Ray Hyman, "Statistics and the test of Natasha" (2005), at [www.csicop.org/specialarticles/natasha2.html](http://www.csicop.org/specialarticles/natasha2.html).

6 Guy Lyon Playfair, "How not to do an experiment". (2005), [www.skepticalinvestigation.org/observer/X-ray\\_sequel.htm](http://www.skepticalinvestigation.org/observer/X-ray_sequel.htm).

7 Hawkins was the leader of Ronnie Hawkins and the Hawks; *sans* Ronnie, the Hawks were the backing band for Bob Dylan's breakthrough appearances as a Rimbaudian rocker of late 1965 and '66, and emerged as The Band in 1968 on Dylan's widely bootlegged *Basement Tapes*, and then their own eponymous album.

8 Alexandra Gill, "All About Adam – 16 Year Old BC Remote Healer" (3 May 2003), [www.globeandmail.com/servlet/ArticleNews/TPStory/LAC/20030503/FCHEAL/?query=Adam](http://www.globeandmail.com/servlet/ArticleNews/TPStory/LAC/20030503/FCHEAL/?query=Adam). See also "Adam"'s own site, [www.dreamhealer.com](http://www.dreamhealer.com), where the disclaimer reads "Adam's techniques are not meant to replace the advice from your health care professional. Your health care is ultimately your decision."



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### HAVE YOUR SAY

## forum

### Squirrels on Crack!

Drug-crazed squirrels running wild on the streets of south London? **BEN AUSTWICK** spotted an urban legend in the making and attempted to trace it to its origins.



**BEN AUSTWICK** is a writer who lives in South London. He sits around reading and watching TV, with occasional bursts of activity. This is his first piece for Fortean Times.

Last autumn, on Saturday, 8 October 2005, an outlandish story about crack-addicted squirrels terrorising Brixton, south London, appeared all over the British press (FT207:10). Reported in the *Sun*, the *Daily Mirror*, and even the respectable broadsheet the *Guardian*, the story met with laughter and incredulity. Nevertheless, it was presented as a news item, and the assumption was that there must have been at least an element of truth in it. So where did the story come from? And, more to the point: was it true?

According to the press, the phenomenon was the result of a police clampdown on street drug dealing in Brixton. Dealers had taken to burying their crack in gardens on the streets they worked in order not to risk being caught in possession, digging it up as and when it was needed.

The buried crack started going missing, sparking off war on the streets between dealers, who accused each other of stealing their stashes. What they didn't know was that the crack was being dug up by squirrels, which, having come across it on their foragings, had developed a taste for the drug. Now, innocent residents were being terrorised in their own gardens by violent crackhead squirrels desperate for their next fix.

The story had first been reported the previous day in the *South London Press*, a small-circulation local newspaper for the inner south London boroughs. It was based on one 'fact', an interview with a Brixton resident "who did not wish to be named".

"I was chatting with my neighbour who told me that crack users and

dealers sometimes use my front garden to hide bits of their stash. An hour earlier, I'd seen a squirrel wandering round the garden, digging in the flowerbeds. It looked like it knew what it was looking for. It was ill-looking and its eyes looked bloodshot, but it kept desperately digging. It was almost as if it was trying to find hidden crack rocks."

Note that there is no explicit sighting of a squirrel taking crack – instead a suspiciously vague and hyperbolic comment presented with a distinctively journalistic flourish. However, it is unlikely that a newspaper, no matter how small its circulation, would completely invent a front-page story; it had to have origins somewhere.

So, were investigative reporters on the *South London Press* following strange rumours and tantalising local myths, only to be thwarted by terrified locals unwilling to talk? No – they were surfing the Internet like the rest of us.

On 3 October, a few days before the *South London Press* article appeared, a discussion about drugs took place on the Brixton-based urban75.org website. A log from the day shows the following post:

"Yesterday I was chatting to one of my neighbours and he pointed out the reason I found his screwdriver in my front garden was that crack users / dealers sometimes hide bits of their stash in our garden. An hour earlier I'd seen a squirrel wandering round the garden, digging in the flowerbeds. Now I assume if the squirrel dug up a rock of crack and nibbled it, it wouldn't get any effect. But what if it did? And do I face the prospect of dreaded crack squirrels? Turf wars (flower bed wars) between

### South London Press



#### SOURCES

*South London Press*, 7 Oct 2005 [icsouthlondon.icnetwork.co.uk/0100news/0400lambeth/tm\\_objectid=16217629&method=full&siteid=50100&headline=squirrels-on-crack-name\\_page.html](http://icsouthlondon.icnetwork.co.uk/0100news/0400lambeth/tm_objectid=16217629&method=full&siteid=50100&headline=squirrels-on-crack-name_page.html)

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dealers and squirrels? :confused:

"Squirrels have nasty bites so I'm now worried by being done over by a twitchy squirrel."

From innocent joke to local paper to plastered all over the national press; if I was the original Internet poster I'd be rather pleased with myself.

In some ways, it's a shame that the origins of such a splendid urban legend can be tracked down so quickly and easily. In the days before the Internet, the story of the crack squirrels would have been told and retold in pubs and offices across the land, slowly spreading until Chinese whispers made it a 'fact', and perhaps eventually appearing in print, with little hope of anyone ever finding the real story behind it. Instead, a lazy journalist picked it off the Internet and embellished it; further lazy journalists lifted it from a local paper and circulated the story farther afield. And a simple bit of googling exposes the whole thing, just as quickly, as a sham. If the classics of the urban

legend had arisen in the present day, I suspect their life cycles would have followed the same pattern and been just as brief.

But all is not lost. The *South London Press* article carried an interesting statement to back up its story: "Crack-addicted squirrels are a well-known phenomenon in the parks of New York and Washington DC". This gave me hope that such a splendid story had some basis in fact after all. By 18 October, Fox News in the US was reporting on London's drug-crazed squirrels, adding that: "So-called 'crack squirrels' are already acknowledged as a problem in American cities such as Washington, DC, and New York".

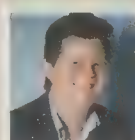
The story had apparently spread across the pond, with US journalists quite happy to accept that their country also had a crack squirrel problem on no more than the say-so of the *South London Press* (via *The Sun*).

Nevertheless, I still hope the myth contains some element of reality, however obvious the trail of fabrication has become; as a Brixton resident myself, I can't help watching the squirrels in my garden for signs of crack addiction.



# A pioneering anomalist

The late Marcello Truzzi may have been a founder of CSICOP but he was far from being a blinkered zealot. PAUL SIEVEKING offers an appreciation of a champion of even-handed, open-minded scepticism.



PAUL SIEVEKING is one of the founding editors of *Fortean Times*. He continues to monitor the avalanche of weird news arriving at Fortean Towers.

Marcello Truzzi (below) was born in 1935 in Copenhagen, where his father, the celebrated juggler Massimiliano Truzzi, was performing. His mother Sonya was Massimiliano's Russian assistant, apparently a beauty who often missed her cue because she was posing for the audience. The Truzzis were a famous circus family, part of Circus Truzzi in Russia. They moved to the United States in 1940 after Massimiliano was hired to juggle in the centre ring of the Ringling Bros and Barnum & Bailey Circus. The young Marcello worked as a clown, sold tickets and learnt magic tricks. As Roger Westcott (the anthropologist who coined the term "anomalistics") pointed out: "Association with the circus taught him that every institution has a 'backstage' as well as a public face. Preoccupation with what was going on backstage, the hidden reality of society, would shape Marcello's approach to sociology and later to the paranormal."

Truzzi obtained a master's degree in sociology at the University of Florida and a doctorate at Cornell University, where he studied the university's large collection of books on witchcraft. He was fascinated by the way odd subjects faded in and out of scientific respectability. In 1974, he became chairman of the sociology department at Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti. He amassed a huge private library and had exceptionally broad interests, including stage magic, music, carnivals, sideshows and circuses, the sociology of science, folklore, anthropology, psychology, popular culture, and politics. His 1968 book *Sociology and*



*Everyday Life* was a bestseller, shifting roughly 200,000 copies.

In the early 1970s, he edited several other sociology books and published a privately circulated newsletter, *The Zetetic*, which examined astrology, catastrophism, parapsychology, ufology and other protosciences (as he liked to call them). Zetetic comes from the Greek "to seek". As an adjective, it

means "proceeding by inquiry"; as a noun, it means an investigation or a seeker – specifically a Pyrrhonist. Pyrrho (c.360-270 BC) denied there were adequate grounds for certainty as to the truth of any proposition whatever. Zetetic was an obscure word and, in spite of Truzzi's efforts, remains

so. With Martin Gardner, James Randi and Ray Hyman, he discussed forming something called Resources for the Scientific Evaluation of the Paranormal.

Meanwhile, Paul Kurtz, professor of philosophy at the State University of New York at Buffalo and editor of *The Humanist*, issued a manifesto against astrology and persuaded 186 scientists and academics, all claiming to be experts in the field, to sign it. (Carl Sagan, incidentally, thought it was too authoritarian and refused to sign.) The enormous publicity generated by this manifesto encouraged Kurtz to mobilise opposition against what he saw as the rising tide of irrationality. Impressed by *The Zetetic*, he invited Truzzi to help found what became the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP), and edit its publication, which initially was also called *The Zetetic*.

The first issue appeared in the autumn of 1976. Truzzi saw the aim of the Committee as engaging in a dispassionate investigation of paranormal claims, as its name suggested; but it soon became clear that Kurtz and the other hard-liners saw themselves as crusaders against the paranormal and "New Age flimflam", and wished to turn the Committee into a weapon of propaganda. Truzzi, on the other hand, felt he was a true sceptic, who doubts, rather than a debunker, who denies. For the latter, he later preferred the terms "scoffer" or "pseudo-skeptic" (his own neologism).

"I don't doubt that 99 per cent of occultism is empirically false," he told the *New York Times*, "but the approach to it has to be based on an examination of the evidence by people qualified to do that, not on outright condemnation." He resigned from CSICOP and in 1978 founded his own publication, *The Zetetic Scholar*; the Committee's publication then became the more "hard-hitting" (i.e. debunking) *Skeptical Inquirer*, edited by Kendrick Frasier.

In 1982, Truzzi became one of the founders of the Society for Scientific Exploration (SSE), which in many ways became what he had hoped CSICOP would be – a means for the scientific investigation of anomalies. Unlike CSICOP, however, there would be no corporate point of view. SSE became a forum for investigators rather than an organ for investigation. Truzzi served as council member, speaker, and active participant. He created the now-defunct Center for Scientific Anomalous Research and, between 1978 and 1987, published 13 issues of *The Zetetic*


*Scholar*.

"Although Truzzi in his personal philosophy had no belief at all in either flying saucers or the paranormal," wrote Jim Moseley, editor of *Saucer Smear*, "he was a very unusual person in that some of his best friends were Believers of one stripe or another, and he would stick up for these friends vigorously without ever endorsing their views." These included Uri Geller and Jerome Clark, the UFO encyclopaedist.

Clark himself remarked: "It was Marcello [Truzzi], not Carl Sagan, who coined the often-misattributed maxim 'Extraordinary claims demand extraordinary evidence'. In recent years, Marcello had come to conclude that the phrase was a *non sequitur*, meaningless and question-begging, and he intended to write a debunking of his own words. Sad to say, he never got around to it."

Fellow anomalist Ron Westrum pointed out Truzzi's distinction between "crypto" and "para" sciences: "Cryptosciences study 'hidden objects' whose existence can be proved by public demonstration of a single specimen of the disputed category (e.g. a bigfoot carcass). Parasciences, by contrast, deal with unexpected kinds of causality, such as telekinesis, and link apparently disparate orders of events, such as thought and physical force. The proof in parasciences must often be inferential (e.g. via statistics), rather than a simple physical demonstration. Michel Gauquelin's theories of planetary effects on birth times is an example of a parascientific claim."

Besides his publications on sociology, Truzzi wrote *Caldron Cookery: An Authentic Guide for Coven Connoisseurs* (1969), *The Blue Sense: Psychic Detectives and Crime* (with Arthur Lyons; 1992), *UFO Encounters* (with Jerome Clark; 1992), and *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Extraterrestrial Intelligence* (with Michael Kurland; 1999). He also co-edited *Criminal Life: Views From the Inside* (1972), *Revolutionaries on Revolution: Participants' Perspectives on the Strategies of Seizing Power* (1973), and *Anthropology and American Life* (1974).

He is survived by his wife Patricia, an artist and illustrator, two sons, Gianni and Kristopher, and a granddaughter, Sofia. 

Marcello Truzzi, sociologist, stage magician and co-founder of CSICOP, born Copenhagen, Denmark, 6 Sept 1935, died (from cancer) Ann Arbor, Michigan, 2 Feb 2003, aged 67.

## ON PSEUDO-SKEPTICISM A COMMENTARY BY MARCELLO TRUZZI

Over the years, I have decried the misuse of the term "skeptical" when used to refer to all critics of anomaly claims. Alas, the label has been thus misapplied by both proponents and critics of the paranormal. Sometimes users of the term have distinguished between so-called "soft" versus "hard" skeptics, and I in part revived the term "zetetic" because of the term's misuse. But I now think the problems created go beyond mere terminology and matters need to be set right. Since "skeptical" properly refers to doubt rather than denial – non-belief rather than belief – critics who take the negative rather than an agnostic position but still call themselves "skeptics" are actually *pseudo-skeptics* and have, I believe, gained a false advantage by usurping that label. In science, the burden of proof falls upon the claimant; and the more extraordinary a claim, the heavier is the burden of proof demanded. The true skeptic takes an agnostic position, one that says the claim is *not proved* rather than *disproved*. He asserts that the claimant has not borne the burden of proof and that science must continue to build its cognitive map of reality without incorporating the extraordinary claim as a new "fact". Since the true skeptic does not assert a claim, *he has no burden to prove anything*. He just goes on using the established theories of "conventional science" as usual. But if a critic asserts that there is evidence for disproof, that he has a *negative hypothesis* – saying, for instance, that a seeming psi result was actually due to an artifact – he is *making a claim* and therefore also has to bear a *burden of proof*.

Sometimes, such negative claims by critics are also quite extraordinary – for example, that a UFO was actually a giant plasma, or that someone in a psi experiment was cued via an abnormal ability to hear a high pitch others with normal ears would fail to notice. In such cases the negative claimant also may have to bear a heavier burden of proof than might normally be expected.

Critics who assert negative claims, but who mistakenly call themselves "skeptics", often act as though they have no burden of proof placed on them at all, though such a stance would be appropriate only for the agnostic or true skeptic. A result of this is that many critics seem to feel it is only necessary to present a case for their counter-claims based upon plausibility rather than empirical evidence. Thus, if a subject in a psi experiment can be shown to have had an opportunity to cheat, many critics seem to assume not merely that he probably did cheat, but that he *must* have, regardless of what may be the complete absence of evidence that he did so cheat and sometimes even ignoring evidence of the subject's past reputation for honesty.

Similarly, improper randomization procedures are sometimes assumed to be the cause of a subject's high psi scores even though all that has been established is the possibility of such an artifact having been the real cause. Of course, the evidential weight of the experiment is greatly reduced when we discover an opening in the design that would allow an artifact to confound the results. Discovering an opportunity for error should make such experiments less evidential and usually unconvincing. It usually disproves the claim that the experiment was "air tight" against error, but it does not *disprove* the anomaly claim.

Showing evidence is unconvincing is not grounds for completely dismissing it. If a critic asserts that the result was due to artifact X, that critic then has the burden of proof to demonstrate that artifact X can and probably did produce such results under such circumstances. Admittedly, in some cases, the appeal to mere plausibility that an artifact produced the result may be so great that nearly all would accept the argument; for example, when we learn that someone known to have cheated in the past had an opportunity to cheat in this instance, we might reasonably conclude he probably cheated this time, too. But in far too many instances, the critic who makes a merely plausible argument for an artifact closes the door on future research when proper science demands that his hypothesis of an artifact should also be tested. Alas, most critics seem happy to sit in their armchairs producing *post hoc* counter-explanations. Whichever side ends up with the true story, science best progresses through laboratory investigations.

On the other hand, proponents of an anomaly claim who recognize the above fallacy may go too far in the other direction. Some argue, like Lombroso when he defended the mediumship of Palladio, that the presence of wigs does not deny the existence of real hair. All of us must remember science can tell us what is empirically unlikely but not what is empirically impossible. Evidence in science is always a matter of degree and is seldom if ever absolutely conclusive. Some proponents of anomaly claims, like some critics, seem unwilling to consider evidence in probabilistic terms, clinging to any slim loose end as though the critic must disprove all evidence ever put forward for a particular claim. Both critics and proponents need to learn to think of adjudication in science as more like that found in the law courts, imperfect and with varying degrees of proof and evidence. Absolute truth, like absolute justice, is seldom obtainable. We can only do our best to approximate them.

This article originally appeared in *The Zetetic Scholar*, #12-13, 1987.







# Prod God only

A misnamed study sticks to the straight and narrow, and muddles the theory



## The Sacred Gaze

Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice

David Morgan  
University of California Press  
Pb, illus, notes, bib, ind, \$21.95/£13.95, ISBN 052043064  
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £13.95

Religious imagery can stir emotions, it can unite believers; it can be a focus for meditation or contemplation, it can help draw us closer to the divine. *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* should, then, be a fascinating study. Sadly, it isn't.

For a start, such a book should be a work of art in itself, or at least be a gallery of spiritual artwork. Although this book contains 72 illustrations, they are all monochrome and printed on the non-gloss text page itself – always aesthetically unpleasing. A further problem, indicative of a much more significant problem in the text, is the paucity of non-Christian images.

When the author speaks about religion, with a few exceptions, he means Christianity, specifically Protestant Christianity, and even more specifically, US conservative Protestant Christianity of the last

century and a half. Rarely have I read an academic text with such narrow parochial horizons.

What are missing, almost entirely, are images and discussion on the richness and stylised beauty of Orthodox icons; on the gaudiness of much Catholic religious imagery such as pierced sacred hearts; on prayer cards of Our Lady of Guadalupe and a hundred other places; on paintings and statues of the Virgin Mary and other saints in thousands of churches worldwide, foci of veneration for Catholics; and then there are crucifixes and pietàs; there are Tarot images and Totem poles; and there are centuries of sacred sexual imagery in Hinduism. These are the glory of "religious visual culture"; pious prints in Victorian journals of "the family at prayer" are only the tiniest part of it.

That's the "practice". The "theory" is woolly and subjective, with the absence of discernible academic rigour more usually typical of post-structuralist media studies.

I'd like to have seen what a decent anthropologist would have made of the same topic. But I'll excuse the book a lot for quoting Stanislaw Lec's advice to iconoclasts destroying idols: "When smashing monuments, save the pedestals – they always come in handy."

David V Barrett

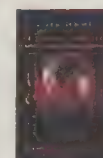
**Fortean Times Verdict**  
A PAROCHIAL GAZE: A VISUAL AND SACRED DISAPPOINTMENT **4**

## Are We Alone?

The Stanley Kubrick Extraterrestrial Intelligence Interviews

Anthony Frewin (ed)

Elliott & Thompson  
Pb, xiv+256, illus, bib, £12.99, ISBN 1904027458  
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £11.99



In 1965, Stanley Kubrick commissioned a series of filmed interviews with leading scientists which were to be edited into a prologue for *2001: A Space Odyssey* to persuade the film-going public that it was more serious than the typical lowbrow sci-fi flick.

The prologue was, probably thankfully, dropped from the final version of the movie. Extracts appeared in *The Making of Kubrick's 2001* (1970), but the full interviews were not released. And it seems they never will be – a search for the original footage with an eye to inclusion on a DVD proved fruitless.

This book is the next best thing, containing lightly edited transcripts of 21 interviews with key thinkers in 1960s physics, astronomy, biology, computing science and other fields. Freeman Dyson, Fred Whipple, Bernard Lovell, BF Skinner, Marvin Minsky and Margaret Mead are just a few of the diverse names here.

It's an intriguing glimpse at how these figures regarded the frontiers of science. Much of their speculation is now 40 years out of date, which makes it seem rather nostalgic; many were confident that advanced machine intelligence, and routine space travel and colonisation, would be facts of life by 2001. Talks with Jesuit professor Francis Heyden and Rabbi Norman Lamm seem less dated, theology having undergone less empirical refinement than the physical sciences over the past four decades.

Kubrick's factotum and intellectual executor Anthony Frewin (also a novelist of some ability) has done a serviceable job as editor, adding useful background material, footnotes (quoting Fort's "I think we're property" at one point), and a sprinkling of photos of Kubrick at work. Unfortunately, the end result is limited by the quality of the raw material: the transcripts were prepared for reference during production, and were never intended for publication. Words

or phrases are often omitted, Kubrick's colleague Roger Caras was not a particularly insightful or informed interviewer, and the extemporised responses of his interviewees are, naturally enough, often muddled and repetitious.

The book is not much more than a curiosity, but a welcome one for anyone with an interest in recent scientific history. For a Kubrick fan, it's interesting to see an emphasis on the evolution of machine intelligence – not a subject that played much part in the completed *2001*, but one which was at the heart of his long-gestating *AI*.

Tim Chapman

**Fortean Times Verdict**  
INTRIGUING BACKGROUND TO 2001 BUT LACKS DEPTH **7**

## The Secret of Bryn Estyn

The Making of a Modern Witch Hunt

Richard Webster

The Orwell Press  
Hb, 722pp, illus, notes, ind, £25.00, ISBN 0951592246  
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £25.00



In the mid-1980s, allegations were made that inmates of Bryn Estyn, a council-run home for boys in North Wales, were being abused. Police found no evidence, but the allegations spread: there was a scandal at Bryn Estyn, maybe even a paedophile ring involving the local police. (Paedophile – sometimes Satanic – rings were being alleged all over Britain.)

More enquiries were followed by more allegations, and the media were filled with the story. A link to a neighbouring police force prompted an enquiry there; and so it spread, an ever-widening pool of allegations and inquiries, until more than 30 police forces in England and Wales were investigating alleged abuse in council-run children's homes, all triggered by the Bryn Estyn story. Tens of thousands of statements were taken by police forces who "trawled" former residents of council homes for allegations, thousands of staff were named as abusers, and perhaps a

hundred care workers wrongfully convicted.

After eight years' research, reading tens of thousands of pages of official reports and court transcripts, interviewing hundreds of people and micro-analysing the allegations, the author shows that the Bryn Estyn allegations were inventions. One residential care worker in North Wales, not in Bryn Estyn, was eventually convicted of indecent assault. There was no paedophile ring in North Wales. The allegations were initially made up by inmates, amplified by care workers and the media, and then – this is one of the author's major points – the process of investigation took over as the main engine of the story. The police "trawl" for allegations, accompanied by talk of compensation for the victims, produced the expected allegations – "expected" because the police had become infected with the theory that there was widespread abuse of children in local authority homes. (Lord save us from people in the grip of theories!) Asked how the police judged the veracity of these allegations, one senior policeman said simply – and gobsmackingly – "by volume". "Lots of allegations" equals "must be true". Consider how strange this is coming from the police. The stories they were believing were coming from one of the groups in society the police congenitally disbelieve: young working class men.

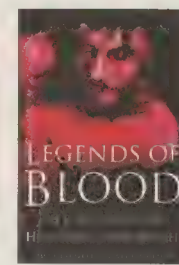
The great British paedophile children's home story, which cost hundreds of millions to investigate, was a moral panic, a witch hunt, the conclusion to a decade of stories, here and in the US, of paedophile and satanic rings abusing children. That almost all of them turned out to be false mattered little: as any press officer will tell you, no-one remembers the denial or the retraction – the allegation is what sticks. Webster's astonishing investigation has added Bryn Estyn to the now lengthy annals of this witch hunt.

Robin Ramsay

**Fortean Times Verdict**  
A MODERN WITCH-HUNT THOROUGHLY DISSECTED **9**

# Better red than dead

Anatomising the vampire – in all its multi-faceted glory – from risen Romanian souls to America's high school sweethearts



## Legends of Blood

The Vampire in History and Myth

Wayne Bartlett & Flavia Idriceanu

Sutton Publishing  
Hb, 214pp, illus, bib, ind, £20.00, ISBN 075093736X  
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £18.00

First, the owl problem. There never was a first vampire, no original, mythical archetype from which Polidori's Ruthven, or Gogol's Viy, or Buffy's Angel, not to mention Stoker's Dracula, are derived. Even the two most basic criteria of a definition – an undead creature preying on the living – are not fixed. The most common element is simply feeding. Not only is the field global but also, given the impossibility of finding a core figure, any comprehensive study rapidly dissipates in endless encyclopædic expansion.

In Romania, for example, there are stories of vampiric *strigoi*, risen souls of the dead haunting the night doing evil to the living. The term means "witches" and is linguistically derived from the Latin *striges*, legendary creatures feeding on human flesh, but this name in turn is derived from the Greek word for "owl". Maybe vampires are owls writ large. But there are other grisly creatures of the night sneaking behind vampire stories (bats and wolves and rats), reminders of the unpalatable truth that life feeds on life. A common motif of vampire stories is the betrayal of loved ones. Perhaps these tales embody our fears of the carnivore on the other side of the dining table? Vampires might

be the projection of our primal terror of cannibalism. In that case, Hannibal Lecter is a sort of vampire. In Montague Summers's classic *The Vampire: His Kith and Kin* (1928) there is a fantastical print of a wildman crawling through a yard of severed limbs, torsos and heads, carrying the body of a baby in his mouth, like a fox that has raided the chicken coop. If the study of vampirism includes anthropophagism, it also leads to the blood and wine of the Christian Eucharist with its various black inversions. What is remarkable about the present volume is how many of these endless accretions the authors have packed into 200 pages.

In *Legends of Blood*, Bartlett and Idriceanu anatomise the vampire corpus. Given the impossibility of delineating any essential vampire story, the book effectively resolves into an encyclopædia of a dozen main topics – The Path of Blood, Landscapes of Magic, Beauty and the Beast, The Undead, and so forth – each of these, since no element is indispensable, fragmenting into numerous tales, versions, pathways, tangents. For instance, the traditional gothic setting is obviously unnecessary: as Buffy demonstrates, legions of demonic parasites may lurk beneath the antiseptic Formica surfaces and narrow minds of a modern American high school. Nor is it vital to be undead: a chapter on "A Complementary Figure of Blood – the Witch" draws parallels between mediaeval covens circling erotically in the open air waiting for their master, Satan, and the ghostly, delectable family who now throng around the vampire. Their widdershins dancing, we are told, "replaces the life-bringing movement of the sun with a hellish ritual symbolising the destruction of the world." I can think of a few current witches who might disagree with that perspective. The difficulty is that no sooner do you look at a

vampire than he steps back into the shadows and you are left with good old-fashioned Devil-worship and the vast literature of horror. Even if there are no limits, this is a worthwhile compendium of some significant aspects of the subject.

One of the most interesting chapters recounts the history of "epidemics" of vampirism in late 17th-century Eastern Europe. Discounting the speculation that there may really have been a Master Vampire, a plausible explanation is that the traditional cultures in these territories were at that time being absorbed into the great modern empires, particularly the Austro-Hungarian. For mainstream Europe this was the Age of Reason, of Science, of Voltaire, and Dr Johnson's rude good sense. "The true vampires," Voltaire asserts, "are the churchmen who eat at the expense of the king and the people." The outbreaks at the edge of the new Europe were a kind of folk hysteria in reaction to cultural dislocation. Certainly, the vampire plagues were mainly notable for the prevailing climate of panic; and the accounts of these outbreaks were invariably written by educated outsiders titillating the prurience of a newly literate reading public in the great capitals. Vampirism became a topic of conversation in the coffee houses of London and Paris, a rising wave of popular interest in an apparently new figure of evil, who was ultimately thrown up by the tide in, yes, Whitby: Dracula had arrived.

As an anatomy rather than an argument, *Legends of Blood* is probably better perused than read; its ingredients of legend and lore and anecdote yield ample food for thought.

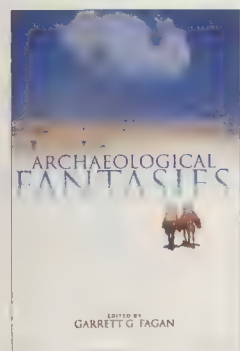
Patrick Collins

**Fortean Times Verdict**  
A WELL-RESEARCHED TOUR OF VAMPIRE LORE **8**



# The cranks versus the cranks

The scattergun approach to defending their territory can be unconvincing, but some of the academic gatekeepers hit their targets – the usual suspects – unerringly



## Archaeological Fantasies

How pseudoarchaeology misrepresents the past and misleads the public

Ed. Garrett G. Fagan

Routledge  
Pb, 420pp, notes, bib, ind, £25.00, ISBN 0415305934  
FORTANE TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £25.00

Not too many years ago, most professional archaeologists felt that the public should passively adhere to whatever orthodoxies held sway at the time. Despite that, the late 1960s and 1970s saw an outpouring of alternative and fringe ideas, ranging from Erich von Däniken's fantasies about the extraterrestrial origins of civilisation, to the reappraisal of Alfred Watkins's leys, reinvented as lines of energy criss-crossing the planet. The archaeological establishment generally ignored these developments.

During the 1980s, the profession changed rapidly, and most archaeologists recognised that opening up the subject to a wider audience was crucial. New strands of archaeological theory that could engage with some of the more progressive ideas coming from the fringe also emerged. By the late 1990s, it was sometimes difficult to know whether the academic theorists or alternative archaeologists were more radical, and many of both camps' former prejudices had broken down. However, archaeology still

has its share of those who will disregard any voice that does not come from the academic establishment. Equally, one doesn't have to look far to find the most outlandish alternative (pseudo-) archaeological theories. *Archaeological Fantasies* is written by mainly academic contributors who represent the former.

Early sections of the book look to define the generic term pseudoarchaeology, and to contrast it with the methodology of scientific archaeology. If scientific research is the wholly impartial, rational study of empirical data, then pseudoscience is portrayed as its opposite: emotional and biased, with a tendency to exclude evidence that does not support whatever wild claim is being made. Scientific enquiry, archaeological or otherwise, is presented as being possible only in a peer-reviewed academic environment, which might be true as an ideal. Certainly, it is hard to disagree with the observations on the woeful methodological shortcomings of much of the alternative archaeology that the book's contributors are keen to point out. Ignoring the complexities of modern society and culture, the contributors leap from that observation to the conclusion that anything that does not come from an academic environment is, by definition, pseudoscience, thereby tarring everyone and everything from Erich von Däniken and Graham Hancock to Hindu nationalists, Creationists and even the Indiana Jones films with the same brush.

Surprisingly, most of the contributors appear to know very little about 'alternative' or 'fringe' archaeology, and specific examples of alleged pseudoarchaeology are fairly thin on the ground. There are, to throw in a few examples, no references to the earth/ancient mysteries scene, the contested role of dowsing in archaeology or New Age approaches to sites, and

only vague and unsatisfactory references to folklore and mythology. One contributor, NC Flemming, states: "I cannot think of a single example where a 'fringe' idea from the world of pseudoscience has been gradually established as proved and has been integrated into the academic textbooks". This could be challenged on many levels, but in the world of archaeology we only need to look at archaeoastronomy to see an area of study that was once considered supremely cranky but 30 years on has gained academic respectability through patient and honest scientific enquiry. *FT* readers will no doubt be amused (or outraged, perhaps) to hear that the same contributor asserts: "It is anti-educational to have magazines such as *New Scientist* and *Scientific American* overtly grouped [on newsstands] with *Bizarre Events*, *UFOs*, and *Fortean Times*".

Despite the gross generalisations throughout, a few names turn up again and again. Needless to say – and understandably – the damaging nonsense purveyed by Erich von Däniken in the 1970s is to the fore, and Graham Hancock's ears must have been ablaze while the book was being written, with a whopping 38 entries in the index. Interestingly, the sections of *Archaeological Fantasies* that concentrate on specific targets are altogether more rewarding than the "blasting in all directions at once" of the general pieces.

In spite of these flaws, the book includes some excellent material. Kenneth L. Feder's chapter on research into US students' attitudes towards pseudoarchaeology shows that the overall level of belief in fringe ideas has remained more or less static for 20 years. As Feder concludes: "I believe it is safe to conclude that the sky is not falling". Equally, television producer Christopher Hale's

superb, if depressing, chapter 'The Atlantean Box' spills the beans on the whole sorry business of the 1999 *Horizon* film about Graham Hancock. It's essential reading for anyone who has despaired at the lack of critical bite that is now the norm in television documentaries about archaeological and/or scientific matters, and does much to explain why television, with its endless desire for novelty, gives so much emphasis to unsubstantiated and easily disproved claims about the past. There are other rewarding sections in the book; for example, chapters on how pseudoarchaeological ideas can feed into various shades of nationalism are also enlightening.

Ultimately, it is hard to disagree with many of the criticisms levelled at pseudoarchaeology in *Archaeological Fantasies*. Despite that, there is something unpleasant about a book which so obviously revels in dismissing people as "cranks and nerds", "mystery-mongers", "pseudos" and the like, the worst of whom "have to be abandoned to the clutching mud of the pseudoscientific swamp". You do not have to be an advocate of groundless conspiracy theories that the archaeological establishment keeps the "true mysteries" of the past hidden from the public to realise that the outmoded attitudes shown by some of the book's contributors are part of the reason why people can find alternative narratives about the past so attractive.

In the final tally, this group of academics (albeit one not representative of the profession at large) – and despite some excellent individual contributions – end up looking as cranky as the cranks they set out to undo.

Neil Mortimer

### Fortean Times Verdict

A CURATE'S EGG OF A BOOK, BUT VERY GOOD IN PARTS

7

## Merlin and the Discovery of Avalon in the New World

Graham Phillips

Bear & Co  
Pb, 231pp, illus, notes, bib, \$16.00/£12.99, ISBN 159143047x  
FORTANE TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £12.99



Let's see how Phillips summarises his revelations: "A 1500-year-old saga tells how Merlin left Britain on a boat bound for a mysterious island to the West. The places described... would only have been seen by someone who had journeyed to the New World via the Arctic Sea." The Isle of Avalon turns out to be off New England.

The 'saga' is *The Voyage of Mael Duin's Boat*. It doesn't mention Merlin; the hero has none of Merlin's traditional characteristics. It's online, out of copyright, yet Phillips doesn't encourage us to read it.

Why? Couldn't he explain why a wizard (Nuca) has to tell Merlin (a really famous wizard who isn't a wizard at all here) to take the trip? Or the ants the size of foals? The giant horses with hounds' legs? The big house full of beds and alcohol? The monster that revolves inside its skin? The flaming cat that jumps through Merlin? The sheep that change colour? The island full of black men wearing black? Or the island full of gold, silver, brass and crystal fences, dividing kings, queens, warriors and maidens? The man clothed in hair, supplied with cake by angels? The giant beast in the tree picking up oxen? The giant solid silver pillar in the ocean? The island with 18 women all the crew sleep with? The island with the hairy vicar? The island with a great multitude, playing and laughing without cease? Phillips mentions none of these.

Then it might, of course, have been the bonfire-building otters, encountered "by someone who had journeyed to the New World via the Arctic Sea". I doubt we'll ever find out.

Kevin McClure

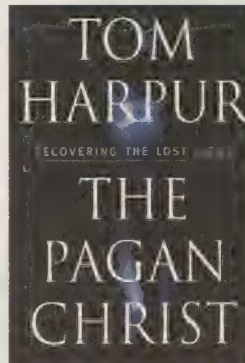
### Fortean Times Verdict

THE WRITING OF FICTION HAS A LONG HISTORY

2

# The end of (literal) history

Deconstructing Jesus as a historical figure proves tricky when even theologians do not have the required symbolic language



## The Pagan Christ

Recovering the Lost Light

Tom Harpur

Thomas Allen  
Hb, 244pp, appx, gloss, notes, bib, ind, £14.99,  
ISBN 0887621457  
FORTANE TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £13.99

*The Pagan Christ* is a curiosity for two reasons; its author, and its timing. In most other respects, it is a solid but unremarkable example of a familiar genre; an account of the history of Christianity slanted towards a more spiritual, less literal form of belief.

Tom Harpur is the voice of liberal Christianity for millions of north Americans. An ex-priest and professional theologian, Harpur has written and broadcast for 30 years. Over that time, his view of faith and religion has developed towards a form of Christian Sufism, with Jesus as a human teacher, and Christ as an archetype of the divine.

Harpur has now relinquished the historical Jesus, in the face of a mountain of evidence that the gospel narrative cannot be historical; every element of the story is prefigured in earlier religious practices, particularly those of ancient Egypt. Few fortians will be shocked by this revelation; but some of Harpur's audience will.

Its timing makes it a critique of two kinds of literalism. The Dan Brown school of hermeneutics relies on tenuous

evidence as factual grounds for speculation; fantasy genealogies and stretched interpretations of incomplete texts. But the product is a narrative with historical plausibility.

Fundamentalism and conservative Catholicism, the two most politically powerful Christian tendencies, are adamant the Bible is history. The absence of any verifiable facts to believe in has not hampered them greatly. Which brings us to the conundrum at the heart of Harpur's enquiry. Why, when all the early teachers said precisely the opposite, is literal belief a *sine qua non* for modern Christianity?

Harpur agonises over this question: literalism is an affront to his faith and his intellect, so he pulls the rug out from under the history of the church, and then attempts to show that there is still a basis for Christian faith, among the ruins. This is upping the quixotic ante; Harpur will be pilloried for knocking down the old church and trying to start a new one.

The main sources for the book's arguments are Godfrey Higgins, Gerald Massey, and Alvin Boyd Kuhn (with a few nods of acknowledgement to Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy's *The Jesus Mysteries*). Massey is well-known for his esoteric interests, especially in ancient Egyptian religion; the other two are probably less familiar.

Higgins predates Ignatius Donnelly, but writes about an ancient civilisation destroyed in a catastrophe, who knew far more than we do, and tried to pass it on as perennial wisdom. He also wrote a history of the Druids; but his *Anacalypsis* (1833) is the first comprehensive analysis of biblical source material.

Kuhn is a 20th-century historian of religion, who spent a good deal of his life demonstrating that Christianity is neither original nor historically true; an

excellent public speaker, he drew large crowds to his lectures. His description of modern literalist Christianity as the cult of "a winsome but gruesome personal Jesus" brilliantly encapsulates the pop-idol/terminator theology of modern America.

The cumulative case is this: Jesus was not a historical figure, but a type, one of a long succession of figures, stretching back via Krishna and Zoroaster, Dionysus and Pan, to Osiris and Jesus – yes, Jesus in ancient Egypt (at least, a figure called Iusu/Iu-em-hetep). In crude terms, each is a symbol of the soul's death and resurrection into knowledge, or of the evolution of matter from spirit.

Specific narrative elements always occur: virgin birth from divine parentage; a threat to the child; death on a tree, and resurrection after three days. The miracles are common too; the story of Lazarus is accredited originally to Osiris, who also turned water into wine.

So what does Harpur salvage from the ruins? More than appears to be there. He acknowledges that Jesus did not exist, and that Christ is simply one symbol among many in the ancient world. And yet. For Harpur, Christ is not just a symbol, but the ultimate symbol of divinity in us. He sees a revitalised Christianity, despite Christianity being the edifice that caused the problem in the first place.

This is a brave book, and Harpur has risked a comfortable liberal twilight for his efforts. But it never quite escapes the mindset it wants to deconstruct; it cannot, properly speaking, because we do not have a symbolic language adequate to the task.

Noel Rooney

### Fortean Times Verdict

INTERESTING AND BRAVE, BUT NOT TOTALLY SUCCESSFUL

8



## ON RELEASE UNKNOWN WHITE MALE



On the morning of 2 July 2002, a man comes to on the New York subway. He has no idea where he is or who he is. He is taken to a psychiatric ward and not allowed to leave until he's identified. Eventually, thanks to a scribbled phone number he finds in his backpack, he is able to begin piecing everything together (see **FT205:14**).

His name, he discovers, is Doug; he is an Englishman in his mid-30s who recently gave up stockbroking to study photography in New York. Doctors can't explain his sudden amnesia, which has wiped his episodic memory but not his semantic or procedural memory: in other words, he can't remember his name but finds he can sign documents; as director Rupert Murray puts it, he speaks like an English public schoolboy, has the manners and moral code of an English public schoolboy, but has no idea what an English public school is.

Surprisingly, perhaps, this is a fundamentally uplifting piece of work. Doug's initial terror gives way to a childlike delight in the world and its novelty – snow, love, fireworks, the Rolling Stones. He gets to start life afresh, with a new personality: he is more sober, sensitive – and, on occasion, maddeningly difficult. He makes new friends, with whom he is more comfortable than people from his past. He becomes angry that so much of his character is bound up in others' formulations of it. Conversely, his family and friends

clearly desperately miss the old Doug, are horrified by his dramatic falling out of love with them, and feel, in some cases, that with his amnesia a part of their own past has been ripped away as well. The chances are great that at some point Doug's memory will return. By the end of the film, he isn't sure he wants it to.

All of this raises profound existential questions, which are addressed by the protagonists and by philosopher Mary Warnock, who asks: "He was the same man as he was before the catastrophe, but is he the same person?" What forms our character? What implications does Doug's case have for the existence of an eternal soul, a Freudian ego or a Jungian self? The film also effectively exposes the limits of scientists' understanding of the brain.

Murray is an old friend of Doug's, so the film has an unexpected immediacy and warmth, and feels less exploitative than it might. A cleverly edited mix of dramatic reconstruction, conversations, Doug's video diaries, old Super8 clips and an early interview with a freaking-out Doug, this is a smart film which might, of course, all be a hoax. But, in the final reckoning, this doesn't seem desperately important: the plausibility of the set-up, and the issues raised, means the film remains an affirmation of second chances, with the rare quality of making the world outside the cinema seem a freer, sunnier place. **9/10**  
**Jen Ogilvie**

## Serenity

Dir Joss Whedon, US 2005  
Universal Pictures Video £19.99

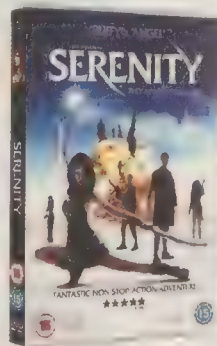
It's an interesting reversal of fortune that Joss Whedon's phenomenally successful TV series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* emerged from a film flop, while his critically acclaimed movie *Serenity* emerged from the ashes of a cancelled TV show. Perhaps as a result, *Serenity* comes across more like an ambitious pilot for a yet-to-be made show than a satisfying film.

Set 500 years in the future, in a universe where the oppressive Alliance has been conducting experiments in social engineer-

ing on a number of rebel planets, the eponymous spaceship *Serenity*, commanded by Captain Malcolm Reynolds (Nathan Reynolds), flies a piratical flag of freedom in an age of conformity, pulling off one successful heist after another across the 'verse (as the Universe is popularly known these days). Until, that is, Reynolds and crew take on a couple of strays – fugitive doctor Simon (Sean Maher) and his teenage sister River (Summer Glau), a psychic super-weapon created by years of Alliance experimentation.

Unsurprisingly, her creators want River back, and *Serenity* is soon being pursued across the length and breadth of the 'verse while Captain Mal tries to figure out what skeleton in the Alliance's closet River has stumbled on (having lost most of her memories, she's not much help).

On its cinema release, *Serenity* was widely hailed for its energy, and praised as if it were some kind of light-footed guerrilla-style subversion of the lumbering behemoths created by George Lucas. But even though Whedon's film doesn't often pause for breath, it's actually a strangely dull affair, particularly in its overlong and overplayed climactic final act, which manages to recycle and condense the accumulated clichés of 20-odd years of movies, games and comic books into one sequence. In fact, there's something alarmingly predictable about the film almost from its opening – and this is because Whedon (an eminently thumpable man on the strength of the interviews contained on the disc) has chosen to build



his movie out of the detritus of so many other texts – *Star Wars* cantina, *Bladerunner* cityscapes, the epistemological conspiracies and Hong Kong punch-ups of *The Matrix* – that one experiences a numbing sense of cinematic déjà vu just minutes into the movie; it never lets up.

The other meta-text for *Serenity* is, of course, *Star Trek* (and behind that, unmistakably, the structural oppositions of the classic Western). With the sort of glib cynicism that's *de rigueur* in crowd-pleasing SF movies, the essentially benign lineaments of the Federation and its project of unification are replaced by yet another conformity-creating, reality-manufacturing regime against which our merry band of outlaws must do battle. If *Star Trek* took the 'garden in the wilderness' of the classic Western narrative to the final frontier, a film like *Serenity* (which at times seems to echo the post-bellum US of the 19th century) brings a Dixie-like distrust of federal government

and a faith in the powers of the Internet (or "broadwave") that is clearly intended to resonate with sectors of the contemporary audience in the same way that *The Matrix* did.

But when the credits roll on Whedon's latest, you suddenly realise that you have no idea what this movie was actually about – if it was about anything. It's the SF equivalent of fast food; good-looking, insubstantial and leaving you profoundly hungry for something better.  
**RC Samson**

**Fortean Times Verdict**  
TOOTHLESS SF ROMP FROM BUFFY CREATOR WHEDON **4**

## Crying Fist

Dir Ryu Seung-Wan, Korea 2005  
Premier Asia £19.99

## Beautiful Boxer

Dir Ekachai Uek, Thailand 2003  
Tartan Video £16.99

While it would be facile to say it ever went away, it has to be argued the boxing movie is enjoying something of a renaissance with the critical and commercial successes of *Million Dollar Baby* (2004) and *Cinderella Man* (2005), while even old genre-stalwart

Sylvester Stallone is getting back in the ring for *Rocky VI*.

Similarly in the East, Thailand's *Ong Bak* (2003) began to turn the tide of martial arts movies from wirework and CGI back to actual fighters and fighting.

*Crying Fist* is the more conventional of these two releases; directed by Ekachai Uekrongtham, ("Korea's answer to Quentin Tarantino") and starring his brother, Ryu Seung-beom, it's the story of two lost souls seeking redemption through boxing.

Gang Tae-Shik (another great performance from *Oldboy*'s Choi Min-Shik), is a faded and jaded Olympic silver-medallist reduced to taking paid beatings on the streets, while just as casually doling-out slaps and punches to his (soon to be estranged) wife and son. Yu Sang-hwan (Ryu), is a surly delinquent who is literally banging his head against the wall when he's asked to try out for the prison boxing team. Their respective stories unfold in parallel, never meeting until they face each other in the ring.

It's a moral, even mawkish film, but redeems itself through the strength of performances and engrossing narrative style.

*Beautiful Boxer* is the weightier of the two films. What would be a curio in any genre is truly bizarre in the seemingly unreconstructed male world of Thai Boxing (*Muay Thai*).

This is the true story of Parinya Charoenphol (Asanee Suwan), a delicate soul who entered the ring in order to pay for his gender-realignment; with its meditations on shifting sexual personae and the inherent (if unspoken) homo-eroticism of combat, it's a study in sexuality reminiscent of Paul Schrader's underrated *Mishima*. It's also a fairly damning indictment of Thai culture, in which often the asset possessed by the poor is their own bodies. (Many years ago, Muhammad Ali icily observed boxing's origins in slavery.)

Asanee Suwan is a revelation, considering he's a professional Thai boxer in his first acting role; clearly, he's a fighter unafraid to embrace his feminine side. To see a victor caked in make-up tenderly wipe the blood from a beaten opponent and kiss him better certainly isn't Tyson/Hollyfield.

This comes highly recommended (but not especially to 'fight fans'; for some of them, the subject-matter might be a little 'odd').  
**Tim Weinberg**

**Fortean Times Verdict**  
TWO VERY DIFFERENT TAKES ON THE BOXING MOVIE **8**



## Primer

Dir Shane Carruth, US 2004  
Tartan Video £19.99

Aaron and Abe are engineers who spend their spare time in a garage, inventing stuff. One day they realise that they have accidentally created a machine which enables time travel, and that they can exploit this happenstance to make money on the stock market. As they repeatedly loop back on themselves, however, paranoia mounts, trust breaks down and events spiral out of control.

This ultra-low budget feature – Shane Carruth quit engineering and taught himself filmmaking in order to write, produce, direct, star in and edit *Primer*; the cast are the crew members, supplemented by relatives or people who donated props – carries off the plot's more fantastical elements thanks to its intelligence, dry humour and realistic tone. Much has been made of the importance of rewatching the film and so untangling the narrative. This misses the point: the film works precisely because the audience is as confused as the protagonists with regard to their place in time, respective intentions, and the wider implications of messing up causality.

The DVD extras do not give away the film's dramatic secrets: the director and crew commentaries dwell instead on technical mistakes and thanking everyone who once donated a sandwich or a piece of chipboard.  
**Jen Ogilvie**

**Fortean Times Verdict**  
SMART AND WITTY TIME TRAVEL TALE IMPRESSES **9**

## SHORTS

### LONG WEEKEND

(Optimum Home Entertainment, £12.99)



This brilliant and overlooked '70s Aussie horror about a pair of urbanites trying to resurrect their disintegrating marriage with a weekend on a remote beach is a genuinely disturbing tale of marital breakdown and nature gone bad, and the sense of daylight panic it evokes is perhaps closer to the work of Algernon Blackwood than anything else in cinema. The R1 Synapse Films version is superior, and includes some useful extras (www.synapse-films.com). **DS 8/10**

### BICYCLE THIEVES/MIRACLE IN MILAN

(Arrow Films, £17.99 each)



Vittorio De Sica's 1947 *Ladri di Biciclette*, a story of everyday survival on the streets of Rome, remains one of the most influential films of the Italian neo-realist movement, and one of cinema's most deceptively simple and deeply moving stories. Again using a cast of largely non-actors, De Sica went on in 1951 to make *Miracolo in Milano*, something of a surprise and a real oddity that combines a neo-realist aesthetic with a comic urban fairytale to produce one of those movies that probably shouldn't work, but does, and brilliantly. It's certainly one of the strangest films ever made, but is as full of warmth and genuine humanity as its director's other works. A pair of genuine, unmissable classics. *Edith Mason*  
**9/10**

### THE HEART IS DECEITFUL ABOVE ALL THINGS

(Tartan, £19.99)



In this adaptation of JT LeRoy's 'autobiography', young Jeremiah is bounced between foster parents, evangelical grandparents, and his increasingly drug-addled whoring mother (Asia Argento) and her boyfriends. So monotonous is the unpleasantness that it becomes numbing and strangely dull. Check out the interview with (the female, surely?) LeRoy, though, and get an opinion on what could be one of America's greatest literary hoaxes. *JO 5/10*

### SAINTS AND SOLDIERS

(Metrodome Distribution, £17.99)



Ryan Little's award-winning indie WWII movie starts off treading familiar enough ground: a small band of American survivors of the Malmédy massacre face a dangerous journey back to their own lines through the frozen Ardennes with half the Wehrmacht on their trail. Surprisingly, though, the movie eschews standard heroics and instead offers us a portrait of a deeply religious, shell-shocked sharpshooter and a moving tale of how faith and humanity survive – or not – amidst the brutalities of the battlefield. Made for peanuts, and balancing its religious themes with some nail-biting action sequences, this is a little gem. **DS 8/10**



## MASTERS OF THE MACABRE

DAVID SUTTON ROUNDS UP THE LATEST HORROR RELEASES ON DVD



UDO KIER IN JOHN CARPENTER'S CIGARETTE BURNS

In a great month for horror on DVD, the most important release is undoubtedly Ishiro Honda's seminal 1954 *Godzilla* (BFI £19.99), making its first ever UK appearance in its original Japanese version. If – as is likely – you've only experienced the re-edited US version (complete with added scenes of a wooden Raymond Burr and *sans* much of the anti-nuclear message), then this is essential viewing.

While the film emerged from the same anxious era as American movies like *Them!* and *Tarantula*, *Godzilla* towers above other Atom Age horrors – largely because of war veteran Honda's uncompromising and pacifistic vision. The scenes of Tokyo burning and the dead and wounded left in the wake of *Godzilla*'s attack can't help but recall both the US firebombing of the Japanese capital and the aftermath of the A-bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This isn't the kind of thing one expects to find in a 1950s monster movie, and it still packs a punch; likewise, the film's downbeat, dreamlike ending, washed over by (the recently deceased) Akira Ifukube's's haunting score, is unique of its kind.

Long-suffering Japanese actors in 100kg rubber monster suits and silly sequels aside, this is a classic, accompanied here by some fascinating extras.

Also rising from the deep comes the H P Lovecraft Historical Society's rather splendid *The Call of Cthulhu*, a no-budget adaptation of the master's story that triumphs against the odds to deliver an authentically Lovecraftian dose of cosmic horror.

Where many attempts to adapt

HPL have floundered in updating and simplifying the original texts, Sean Branney and Andrew Leman have instead turned the clock back to 1926 and elected to shoot their *Cthulhu* in the style of a silent movie of the era, complete with the miniatures, optical effects and intertitles of the day. And it works brilliantly, preserving both the feel and the complexity of HPL's narrative.

This is a genuine labour of love, and its makers' affection for, and understanding of, both the Lovecraftian mythos and the power of silent cinema make this quite simply one of the most successful Lovecraft films yet made. The DVD is available for \$20 from the HPLHS website [www.cthulhulives.com](http://www.cthulhulives.com).

Speaking of HPL, Lurker Films's HP Lovecraft Collection Volume 3 showcases Raymond Saint-Jean's *Out of Mind: The Stories of HP Lovecraft*, starring Christopher Heyerdahl in a playful film essay in which HPL himself encounters themes and characters from his own fictional universe; also included are two shorts by Aaron Vanek, John Stryik's haunting *The Music of Erich Zann*, and an interview with Lovecraft scholar ST Joshi.

Less successful – though still a welcome venture – is Lurker Films's Edgar Allan Poe Collection Volume 1, which offers George Higham's creepy stop-motion take on Poe's 'Annabel Lee'; while throwing up some interesting ideas about Poe and puppetry, it's overlong and perhaps too indebted to Svankmajer to really impress. DVDs are available from [www.lurkerfilms.com](http://www.lurkerfilms.com) at \$21.95.

From literary adepts to their

modern cinematic heirs: Anchor Bay are releasing the first two entries in the recent TV series as *Masters of Horror Volume 1* (£19.99). In this novel but pleasingly simple concept, 13 contemporary directors – a roster including Dario Argento, Tobe Hooper, Takashi Miike and Don Coscarelli – were invited to each make a brand new one-hour film; the results – to judge from this opening salvo – are highly encouraging: John Carpenter gives us the thoughtful and nasty *Cigarette Burns*, the story of a rare film collector's efforts to track down a legendary arthouse movie from the 1960s possessed of such dark power that it drove its audiences to murder, madness or suicide – a kind of cinematic equivalent of the *Necronomicon* (indeed, the film shares a thematic connection with Carpenter's earlier *In the Mouth of Madness*).

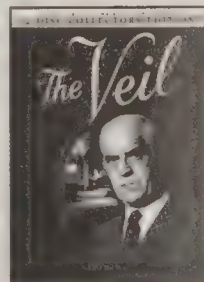
Stuart Gordon's offering is explicitly Lovecraftian: an excellent adaptation of *The Dreams in the Witch House* that goes to show – like *The Call of Cthulhu* – that HPL can make the successful transition from page to screen. This is one of Gordon's most focused efforts, and great, creepy fun from start to finish. I'm already looking forward to further bimonthly instalments in what promises to be a hugely enjoyable series, packed with some very good extras.

Poe, of course, always maintained that the short story was the ideal form for the weird tale – it could be read uninterrupted at a sitting, leaving the reader entirely at the mercy of the storyteller. *Masters of Horror* certainly vindicates this approach, and it's nice to see another variant of it – the portmanteau film – returning in two rather different guises. *Tears of Kali* (FrightFest £19.99) is an ambitious, if somewhat flawed, German take on the sub-genre, in which the framing story and each of the three tales nestling within it concern the perils of New Age mysticism and inner-voy-

aging. Haunting all of the stories are the dangerous forays into the potentialities of the human mind made by the elusive "Taylor-Eriksson Group", a bunch of bearded '70s psychonauts who went, er, a bit too far...

Refusing to tie up all its loose ends, and leaving just the right amount of ambiguity, this is an unusual horror movie that takes its ideas seriously – and to their logical conclusions. Its portraits of misguided Jungians, dabblers in the esoteric and desperate seekers after truth could probably only have come from Germany, but this odd film's appeal deserves to be wider.

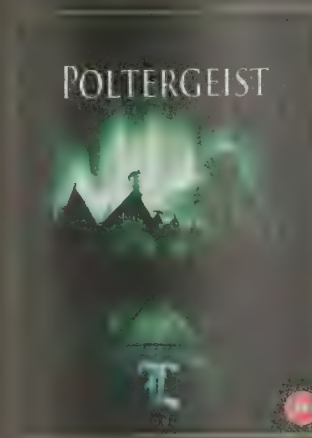
Dark Tales of Japan (Anchor Bay, £16.99) takes a similar tack, and although it has all the visual appeal of a children's TV show and is a hodge-podge of unrelated scares, some of the episodes (particularly the splendid 'Crevice') are highly effective, and the whole thing is undemanding, spooky fun.



More interesting for horror buffs is the appearance on DVD of a never-screened series starring that grand old gentleman of horror, Boris Karloff. *The Veil* (Odeon Entertainment £19.99) was made for Max Roach

Productions, who went bust before the series could be sold, and hence it languished unknown all these years. In format, it's an interesting ancestor of *The Twilight Zone*, with each self-contained episode telling a story of "the unexplained" and featuring the versatile Karloff in a variety of roles, from cruel sea captain to bumbling British bobby. The scares are, admittedly, of the mildest variety, but this is a hugely enjoyable series, perfect viewing for a winter's night in front of a roaring fire, and Karloff's wonderful introductions to each of the ten 30-minute episodes are almost worth the price of admission in their own right. Throw in an extra disc containing the rare Swedish horror series *13 Demon Street*, starring Lon Chaney Jr, and this is a great buy.

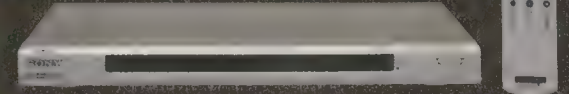
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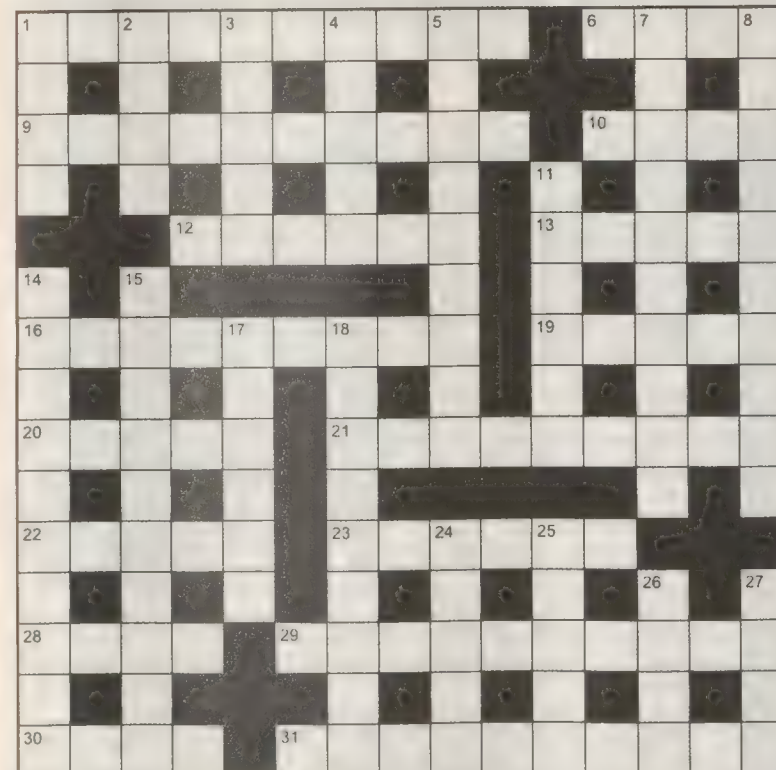
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## FORTEAN TIMES CROSSWORD 03 by Mactabilis



### ACROSS

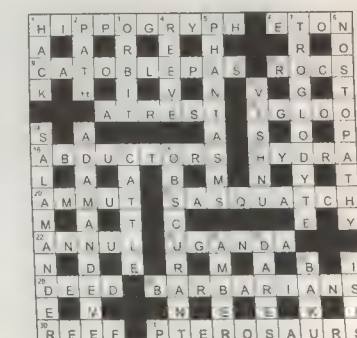
- Redcap initially messes with high poppy to discover horse and gryphon hybrid. (10)
- Alien is never to return to school. (4)
- Places boat in such an arrangement as to find legendary African bull. (10)
- Knight leaving the mountains to find giant birds. (4)
- An experiment in containing the head of Rompo is dead. (2,4)
- Biology removed by constructing a snow dome. (5)
- Doubt cars are useless for alien raiders. (9)
- Tetchy dragon but therein lies the many headed serpent. (5)
- From the stomach of mother returns the Egyptian demon. (5)
- Squash cat and destroy the missing link? (9)
- Unclean! Remove from Church and dissolve. (5)
- Half a slug plus one. Place to find the Lau and the Lukwataca. (6)
- Activity found in Dundee Dragon of the Ishlar Gate. (4)
- Warriors attacked Ra confusing Ba and brains. (10)
- Fear, we hear, returns to the coral. (4)
- Raptures so, about ancient flyers. (10)

### DOWN

- Cut nose off Jack following horrific start. (4)
- A strange hat followed Pegasus to begin the journey. (4)
- Planetary movement beholds the eye. (5)

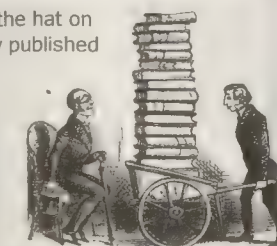
- When considering a girl, Superman's second. (5)
- The head of a Phoenix and a sexual practice found in Hampshire could be apparitions. (9)
- God and lottery created cave dweller. (10)
- Typhoon sat nicely and we were scared to go home? (10)
- Quiet amongst the French, drink to the union of the Hindu god. (6)
- Small girl and he with the German fire lizard. (10)
- Entirely the first Dad 'n Ma 'ave created! (4,3,3)
- South East leaving telecast to repair possible mutilation victims. (6)
- Anti-intellectual almost completed strange insect. (9)
- Speared bream to find orange resin. (5)
- Risks the opening of doors and Ropen's eternal secret. (5)
- Japanese monster in Azerbaijan capital. (4)
- Twin existences of the Egyptian goddess. (4)

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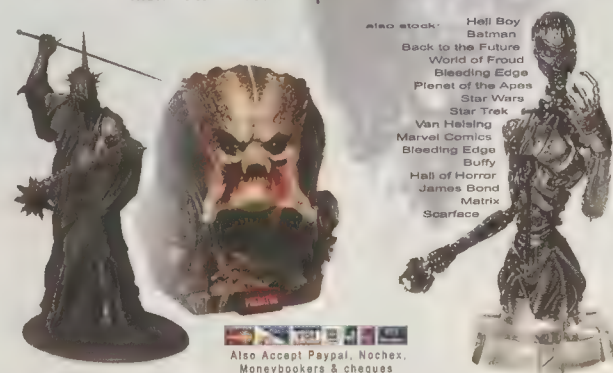
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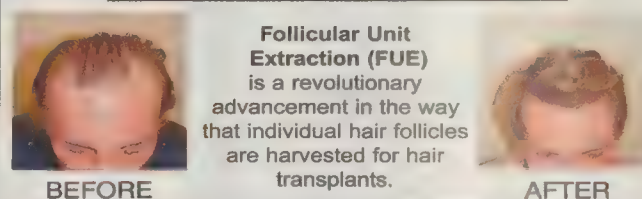
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Dear FT...

# letters



## The ghostly hand

Can anyone provide information on the ghostly hand of Castle Donington? Or was it just a rumour among the troops at the army workshops there in the 1940s?

Once a stately home, later motor racetrack, military depot, and East Midlands airport, Castle Donington adjoins the river Trent about seven miles (11km) south-east of Derby. As I recall from my days in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers in about 1947, there was a memorial stone in the grounds near the river. This bore the account of Lady Catherine Hungerford, who died many years ago in India. In her will, she requested that if she died abroad, her right hand was to be severed and taken for burial in her home grounds. Her wishes were carried out, and the memorial stone was set over the grave of the Lady's hand.

Some of the troops believed that each midnight the hand emerged from its resting place, wandered about tapping on windows, and lay in wait at the top stairs to the roof, to strangle anyone rash enough to approach. All the troops at some time heard tapping on windows. "Good night, Catherine" became quite a catchphrase. Nights always have their noises. There were guards in the house every night, and most avoided the upper stairs at midnight, but the few who sought out the apparition saw nothing and came to no harm. Presumably the memorial was removed, since the airport staff knew nothing about it, or about the legend.

**Colin Dennison**  
*Stranraer, Dumfries and Galloway*

## Habsburg hawks

I really enjoyed reading Jeffrey Vallance's article about the ravens at the Tower of London, but I was a bit taken aback by the reference to the Habsburg curse and the Turnfalken [sic], allegedly meaning "supernatural ravens" [FT206:32]. In German, Turnfalken are kestrels (a Falke is a falcon) – which

could not be confused with a raven (Rabe in German).

In 1020, Count Radbot of the Northern Territories began building a castle in the Aargau. As there were so many hawks around, it became known as Hawk Castle (Havichburg in Old German). The name was so pleasing to Radbot's descendants that they adopted it for their bloodline. Havichburg gradually morphed into both Hapsburg and Habsburg, although the latter spelling is more common. Otto, the grandson of Radbot, is referred to as the Count of Habsburg in a document of 1108. The current head of the lineage, Dr Otto von Habsburg, uses the more popular spelling. [See [www.dragonkeypress.com/articles/article\\_2004\\_10\\_24\\_3605](http://www.dragonkeypress.com/articles/article_2004_10_24_3605)].

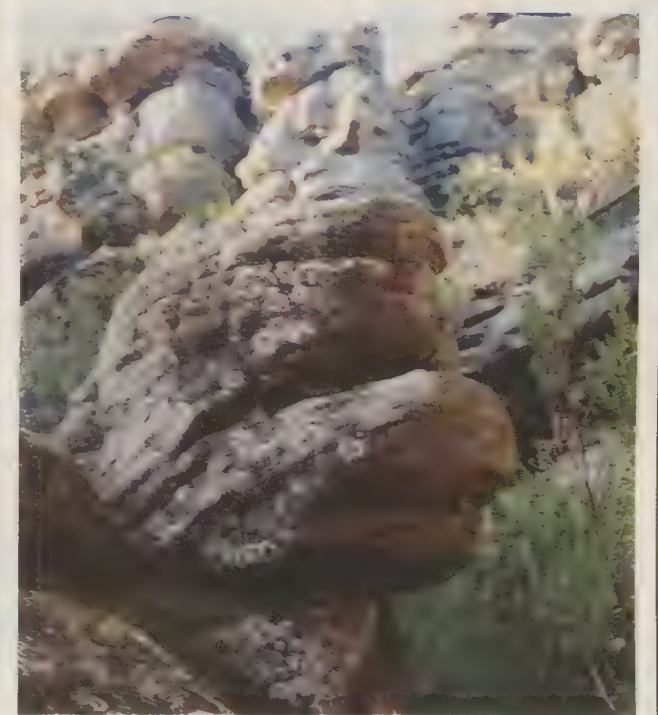
**Anja Bart**  
*Amsterdam, the Netherlands*

## Sheep shock

Malcolm Ewing's literary example of sheep behaving like... well, like sheep, is unfortunately not a good one [FT205:75]. In *Far From The Madding Crowd*, Gabriel Oak's pregnant ewes do not leap one by one to their deaths, but are worried by an inexperienced and unreliable young sheepdog. It drives the panicking beasts through a hedge and up against a rough fence that gives way, pitching them over a cliff. Oak doesn't witness the event or intervene to save the remaining 50, which have already lambled and are safe in a separate enclosure. Arriving too late, he can only pity the poor victims, contemplate his financial ruin, and, next morning, shoot the wretched dog which he rightly regards as the cause of the disaster.

I did try to come up with a better sheep-related mass suicide in literature, but the best I could manage was the sheep stampede in Iain Banks's *The Wasp Factory*. However, since these animals have just been deliberately set on fire by a pyromaniac psychopath who wants to kill his father and brother (actually his sister, and a triple murderer with some rather

## Simulacra Corner



This stone head was photographed by Graham Blissett in the Grampian Mountains of Victoria, Australia, in June 2001. Is it a bird of prey? A turtle? Or some mythical beast?

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them to the editorial post

box (with a stamped addressed envelope or international reply coupon) and we'll give you six months of FTs free for any we use.

unusual hobbies), their behaviour is quite understandable. Perhaps the "suicidal" Turkish sheep were just jaded readers, accepting the stereotype we have forced on them.

**Karen Cunningham**  
*Darlington, Co. Durham*

There is a curious tale, apparently true, that all the sheep in England and Wales fell into a panic for no known reason in the early part of the last century – I believe it may have been in the 1920s or 1930s. A few years later, there was a similar occurrence, but this time only affecting the sheep in Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and

Somerset. Does anyone recall these panics? Perhaps there is still someone around who even witnessed them.

**Paul R Thomas**  
*Easton-in-Gordano, North Somerset*

**Editor's note:** Fort (Books, pp.447, 489) mentions that sheep panicked and broke from their folds over wide areas in the Thames Valley around Reading, Berkshire, on 20 November 1887, 3 November 1888, and 25 October 1889. Without actual evidence, some commentators blamed these stampedes on skyquakes caused by exploding meteors.

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## A plain old man

With reference to your article "World's Strangest Words" [FT206: 12] the normal meaning of the Gaelic word *Bodach* is simply "old man" and not, as suggested, "the ghost of an old man that comes down the chimney to terrorise children". It is a very common word indeed.

**Alasdair MacCaluim**  
Glaschu/Glasgow

## Eels

In his article on the news reports of eels in Victorian England [FT194: 51], Jacob Middleton comments on the Victorian attitude to eels arising from the fact that the eel is unlike any other fish. When researching my booklet *Mystery Sea Serpents of the South West*, I too searched *The Times* archives, where I came across a report dated 24 October 1852. It described the killing of a conger eel (*Conger conger*). While exploring the Thames mud at low tide, a local youngster saw a great disturbance and found a large animal writhing and contorting in the tidal mud. A crowd assembled and eventually killed the animal, but not before several people had been knocked over in the mud. The eel was taken to Rotherhithe, where it was exhibited and attracted great crowds.

It was described as being 13ft (4m) long and of proportionate girth. A similar-sized eel was allegedly caught in the same area 14 years earlier. There is no record of an animal of such size being caught by rod and line. The world record for such a rod-caught beast is currently just over 133lb (51kg). However, such large eels probably still exist: for instance, the *Daily Record* (16 July 2004) reported an attack on a diver by an eel estimated to be 12ft (3.7m) long and 250lb (113kg) in weight.

What is particularly interesting is *The Times* refers to the 1852 eel as "an immense reptile writhing and twisting in the water". Though its reptile identity is of course incorrect, we should bear in mind that it was killed and exhibited only four years after Captain McQuhae

had reported the *HMS Daedalus* sighting of a giant sea serpent, and seven years before the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*. The fear that many people in the country would have felt on encountering such an animal would have been both because of its size and strength and its similarity to a serpent, with its negative biblical connotations. Yet it seems to have been a species that was regularly eaten because in 1863 the Reverend Wood refers to fishermen as having "a ready market" for its flesh.

Mr Middleton suggests that the eel became less popular in news stories from the 1850s onwards because of the growth of the British Empire and the widening horizons of the British reading public. It might also be pertinent to suggest that the pollution of our larger rivers led to a loss of other fish species, and although the eel was fairly resistant to much of that pollution, its prey species were not – and thus a limit might have been placed on its upper size. An eel of three feet or less is unlikely to generate a news story worthy of a national newspaper.

**Chris M Moiser**  
Plymouth, Devon

When I worked in the Clyde shipyards in the 1960s, a story went round about Loch Ness. It was said a car had careered off the road into the loch and a diver was sent to investigate the insurance claim. Apparently, the car had landed



on a kind of ledge only about 80ft (24m) down. When the driver broke surface after investigating, he was heard to be babbling about "giant eels, the size of a man's body, hundreds of them!" In one version of the tale, the diver's hair turned white, while in another he became a babbling wreck confined to a lunatic asylum.

Has anyone else heard this story?  
**Jim Currie**  
Baillieston, Glasgow

## Sober truth

There were several canards about the Abbé Bérenger Saunière and Rennes-le-Château in "An accursed treasure" [FT206:56-57] – although to his credit Nick Warren rightly described the subject matter as figuring in the world of conspiracy theories.

The story of Saunière finding treasure in 1891 dates from after the priest's death; it was first promoted by Noel Corbu who opened a restaurant in the village of Rennes-le-Château in Easter 1955. Because the restaurant was in the middle of nowhere, the treasure yarn was concocted to attract custom. It all took off in January 1956 when a local newspaper featured Corbu in a series of articles, first attracting Robert Charroux, and then a certain Pierre Plantard.

Saunière began renovating his church in 1886 and not in 1891, and the "Visigothic" pillar may not date from before 1891 at all but could just be a copy – a very similar-looking pillar exists in the museum of Narbonne. Neither is it hollow, as can be seen in the village's 'Saunière Museum', where it has been displayed in disassembled form since 1993, the original having been replaced by a replica.

Bertrand de Blanchefort, the Grand Master of the Knights Templar, was not of the same family as the Blancheforts of Rennes-le-Château – he originated from the village of St Emilion-de-Près in Burgundy. There is no evidence that Saunière received the "patronage of royalty, men of letters and scholars", or that he "built roads". The current road up to the village was constructed after his death.

Saunière *did* receive absolution on his deathbed – and was buried on 24 January 1917 at 10 o'clock in the morning, with a High Mass with deacon and sub-deacon – the story of Saunière's "shocking deathbed confession" is another example of modern mythmaking involving Pierre Plantard. Mgr Georges Boyer, the first known critic of Gérard de Sède in print, knew the priest who gave the Last Rites to Saunière and exposed the story as a fraud in 1967.

There is absolutely no evidence that Saunière was planning to engage in further major building works towards the time of his death, when he was still divested of his priestly duties and living in poverty. Antoine Captier, Noel Corbu's son-in-law and present custodian of Saunière's archives, wrote to me in 1988: "Abbé Saunière never planned to build a large tower shortly before his death. This is a figment of my father-in-law's imagination. His sole plan was to build a small summer house..."

There is nothing unusual about the Latin inscription above the entrance to Saunière's church – *Terribilis est locus iste* ("This Place Is Terrible"). This is a common church dedication, quoting the Entrance Antiphon (cf Genesis 28:17): "This is a place of awe; this is God's house, the gate of heaven, and it shall be called the royal court of God" – the very words above the entrance to Saunière's church, which was re-dedicated in 1897 in the presence of Saunière's bishop, who didn't find anything unusual about it at all.

The popular story of the "treasure of Rennes-le-Château" is a prime example of modern myth. Those who promote it today conceal crucial facts concerning how Saunière obtained his wealth – and how he received up to 400 Mass requests every day. He was divested of his priestly duties in 1911 for selling Masses. Whereas Saunière was dealing with tens of thousands of francs, his Bishop was dealing with over a million francs. Both men died divested of their priestly duties for committing financial irregularities within the Church before the split between Church and State in 1905.

**Paul Smith**  
Burton-Upon-Trent, Staffordshire

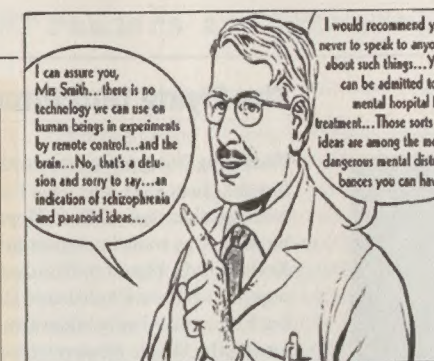
## Quieter & quieter

The irony of the title of Jack Sargeant's well-written Forum contribution about Sonic Warfare [Louder, louder, louder FT205:57] caught my attention. It began with an account of the use of the Long Range Acoustic Device (LRAD) on board a luxury cruise liner, in order to repel pirates, without apparently annoying the cruise-liner's own crew and passengers. The revamped [www.atcsd.com/lrad.html](http://www.atcsd.com/lrad.html) documentation cited – that describes the LRAD as a weapon – is a departure from the LRAD's billing a few years ago as a mere "hailing device", used by the US Navy. (Whimsically, I imagined it being used for messages like, "Come in number seven, your time is up!" on boating lakes too.)

I don't own an LRAD, but in 2004 I did purchase a smaller implementation of the same now-declassified technology, the Hyper-sonic Sound System (HSS), documented at [www.atcsd.com/hss.html](http://www.atcsd.com/hss.html), and sold principally to museums. Many people think it looks a bit like an insectocutor. The HSS is more focused than the LRAD, having only a three-degree beam spread, rather than the LRAD's 15 to 30 degree spread. It is also designed to be quieter than the LRAD. Typically, I whisper into the microphone when using my own HSS device on my "victims". The HSS is therefore much closer in build to the sort of device that is needed to undertake a psychological warfare operation targeted at just a single individual. There is a similar product called the Audio Spotlight.

The US Army's *Military Thesaurus* defines the weapons of which the LRAD is probably one of the least sophisticated at [http://callarmy.mil/products/thesaur\\_e/00016275.asp](http://callarmy.mil/products/thesaur_e/00016275.asp), where it is stated that "the sound modulation may be voice or audio subliminal messages". The term Silent Sound is used in that thesaurus entry. Silent Sound is a technology allegedly being deployed at Guantanamo Bay, according to Jon Ronson (*Guardian* 6 Nov 2004). Jack Sargeant has quite correctly identified the risk of sonic warfare weapons being abused for influencing human thought and behaviour, against civilians and in time of peace, although he appears to make the commonplace mistake of identifying this as merely a potential future risk, not a risk that has already materialised.

Arguably, the greater risk to mankind's freedom of thought comes not from loud use of the relevant technology in its LRAD manifestation, but from its ever quieter use. Individual targeting using weapons more like the HSS or the Audio Spotlight than the LRAD allows one person at a time to be influenced, or each member of a group of people (say, in a meeting) to be influenced differently. Such a psychological warfare operation is almost certainly going to be deniable. A targeted individual can be influenced unawares (or, as the *Military Thesau-*



*rus* puts it, by using "subliminal messages"). This is a "dirty trick" which, tongue-in-cheek, we pulled on several occasions ourselves, during the 2005 General Election Campaign, in which I was one of the three Alliance For Change candidates. We weren't trying to rig the election by influencing enough voters subliminally actually to affect the election result. We were simply out to alert voters to the risk that such subliminal influence poses to humankind. Several of the press releases at [www.AllianceForChange.co.uk](http://www.AllianceForChange.co.uk) give accounts of our escapades.

Of course, ultrasound-based sonic weapons pose nowhere near as serious a risk to human rights as do the other type of weapon identified in the *Military Thesaurus* entry, those which are described as "neuro-electromagnetic" devices and are said to use "microwave transmission of sound into the skulls of persons or animals by wave of pulse-modulated microwave radiation". You can stop hearing sounds delivered the way the LRAD and the HSS deliver sounds that others near you cannot hear simply by going indoors. Unfortunately, as anybody with a cell phone should realise, brick walls and panes of glass don't stop microwave radiation in the way

that they can stop a mere ultrasound carrier beam.

Those interested in learning a little more about the perils of "quieter" sonic warfare, using both microwaves and ultrasound, can read Robin Ramsay's slight abridgment of a speech I delivered on this subject in 2004 (*Lobster* magazine, Winter 2004/5). The literature review papers by biologist John McMurtrey that substantiate the underlying science are published at [www.slavery.org.uk/science.htm](http://www.slavery.org.uk/science.htm), or can be ordered in booklet form.

Readers may be comforted to read, at [www.slavery.org.uk/BritGovCorresp.htm](http://www.slavery.org.uk/BritGovCorresp.htm), the written reassurances I received from the Home Office's Intelligence and Security Liaison Unit during a correspondence lasting from October 2002 to March 2004. Apparently, there was at that time nothing we needed to worry about. Any neuro-electromagnetic sonic warfare directed against civilians by British law enforcement or intelligence services was, in those days, conducted lawfully, and was "subject to independent oversight" by the Office of the Surveillance Commissioners and the Intelligence Services Commissioner.

Alas, repeated enquiries to which replies have been received since the Freedom of Information Act came into force in January 2005 have revealed that neither the Prime Minister nor the Home Secretary any longer holds any information about quieter neuro-electromagnetic sonic warfare. The Prime Minister's Private Secretary says that the Prime Minister *doesn't know* which minister has taken over responsibility from the Home Office for this type of sonic warfare application. It is, however, the job of the Home Office's Intelligence and Security Liaison Unit, now that we have a Freedom of Information Act, to advise those making relevant Freedom of Information Act requests for information, that nobody in the Home Office knows anything about the subject any more, despite the reassurances given in the earlier correspondence, about the lawfulness of it all, and the "independent oversight".

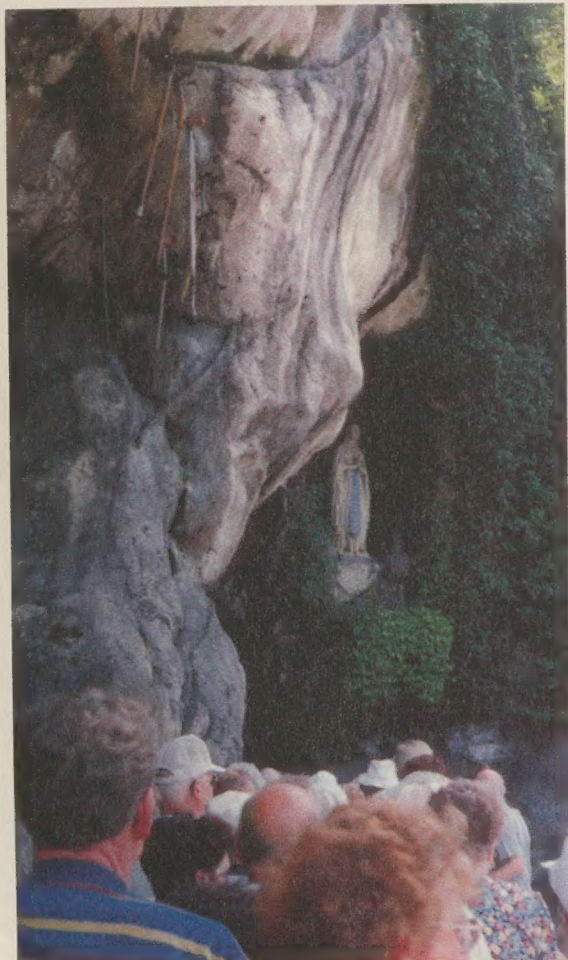
Similar enquiries in the USA do not elicit pleas of ignorance, but rather formal declarations that to release the information might prejudice the interests of national security, or words to that effect.

The position adopted over six years ago by the European Parliament, in Resolution A4-0005/99 Paragraph 27, was that the development or deployment of any sort of weapon for the manipulation of human beings should be banned. Some readers might agree, but the uploaded correspondence makes it clear that the British government certainly doesn't want such weapons banned. It has been very frank in admitting that it would prefer that such weapons were not even discussed, publicly.

**John Allman**  
Knaresborough, North Yorkshire



## Vision's trigger?



As I was passing through Lourdes en route to Cauterets, a town a little further along the



road to the Pyrenees, out of curiosity I went to see the cave where Bernadette Soubirous is supposed to have had her vision, and I spotted some walking sticks hanging on a wire. The faithful were expected to think that their owners had thrown the sticks away after being cured. I took this photograph of the sticks hanging near the entrance to the cave and back in England I showed it to a pious friend of mine, who immediately saw the figure of a female form marked out by the different colours on the rock face. I had to agree with her that this figure could have been what triggered Bernadette's vision of the Blessed Virgin Mary in February 1858.

**Don Warren**  
Liverpool, Merseyside

## The Flying Dutchman

*The Flying Dutchman*, the world's most famous ghost ship, may have finally rounded the Cape of Good Hope and be on its way to its homeport in the Netherlands. The story has always been popular with the English and Germans, but has inspired only lukewarm interest among the Dutch. However, the popular Dutch theme park Efteling is building a 2.1 million euro (£1.4m) ride, to open in April 2006, in which visitors will come face to face with the doomed vessel and her ghostly captain.

The small harbour town of Terneuzen, meanwhile, is trying to capitalise on its mention in captain Frederick Marryat's novel *The Phantom Ship* (1837) as the town from which *The Flying Dutchman* set sail one fateful morning in the 17th century. Activities include a guided walk through the town with a visit to the house in which the captain was supposedly born, now apparently haunted by a number of particularly noisy ghosts. I have just written a book (published in Holland by Begijnkade 18 last December) about the story of *The Flying Dutchman* in history, legend and art, together with a complete collection of eyewitness accounts. For more information (in Dutch) see: [www.reggienaus.com](http://www.reggienaus.com)

**Reggie Naus**  
By email

## Anime for forteans

I was surprised to read Jen Ogilvie's comment (in reviewing the *Sky Blue* DVD) that "No one watches Asian anime for its deep psychological insight and startlingly original plot twists" [FT205:66]. Not only is this technically inaccurate (these tend to be the very things that set anime apart from more conventional "kids' cartoons"), but it grossly generalises about a genre rife with potential fortean interest.

Some examples include *Witch Hunter Robin*, which posits an underground secret police force, evolved out of the Church Inquisitors, and splintering in a web of factions, lies, agendas, and sub-conspiracies. Sort of a *Da Vinci Code* for witch-lovers (and haters). The show goes from head-spinning *X-Files*-style conspiracies to mythical and philosophical questions about the nature of humanity, God, the Devil, and the concepts of "Good" and "Evil" themselves.

Another series, *Inu Yasha*, is more of a direct fantasy (it bills itself as "A Feudal Fairy Tale"), but includes such fortean touches as a time-slip, reincar-

nation, stress-induced psychokinesis, frequent use of auras as plot points (and mystical devices), and an ongoing clash of wits between Machiavellian characters – a clash in which individual moves take the form of odd, often random-seeming incidents (strangely-shaped clouds, a desecrated grave, a strange miasma, mysterious deaths, etc.), leaving witnesses (and viewers) to try to piece together the mysteries on their own. It also features a wide and multifaceted cast, each of whom plays off the others with almost Shakespearean panache and humour.

*Gundam Seed* makes use of a military/industrial conspiracy to precipitate the action, even if that subplot is soon drowned out by the giant robot battles. There's also "evidence" of extraterrestrial life, in the form of a fossilised, whale-like skeleton found in a passing meteor, but this (in true fortean fashion) is never really explained beyond being a bizarre bit of stage-dressing. There's an unexplained – and completely unrelated to either the episode plot or the ongoing arc – fall of plush toy sheep in *Cardcaptor Sakura* (a children's series that also features two possible angels – one of them in the form of a winged lion, or a stuffed toy, depending on mood – overlapping arcane symbols, the ability to see ghosts, and a touch of eugenics).

Shonen Jump's *Shaman King* is entirely centred on the supernatural, delivering pithy observations about numerous religions, the afterlife, and tying various spiritual gurus together in a shamanic tradition. I'd recommend the comics (or manga) more than the anime, however, as the only available DVDs seem to use FoxKids's hackjob of a dub – the manga is clearer, more cohesive, and funnier. And of course there's *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, one of the most (in)famous series of all anime, drawing themes from the Koran, the Torah, the Gnostic Texts, Freud, and Nietzsche to create an apocalyptic (or possibly apocryphic) tale of extinction and apotheosis, featuring three of the most unusual and psychologically twisted characters ever devised (and a cast of "Angels" that resemble Lovecraft's Great Old Ones crossed with *Dr Who*'s rogues' gallery). Again, conspiracies, mysteries, and the truly bizarre all take centre-stage.

The accumulated volumes of Asian anime provide much of interest to any fictionally inclined fortean.

**Mark Brown**  
By email

# it happened to me...

First-hand accounts from FT readers and browsers of [www.forteantimes.com](http://www.forteantimes.com)

## The haunting

I moved to England from Canada in May 1996. I had never really believed in the supernatural until moving into the top floor flat of a huge Victorian house. My husband, my five-year-old daughter and I somehow managed to live in that flat for two years. It had been vacant for several years – it seemed the landlord had trouble getting anyone to sign year-long tenancy agreements. I found this out from a nice woman living in the flat below us. She and her late husband had bought their flat 25 years earlier. She was quite relieved to have a young family above her, as the flat below had long since been converted into a dental surgery, obviously vacant during evening hours.

At first it seemed lovely, looking past the years of neglect, but it wasn't long before strange things started occurring – it was almost as if the flat was driving my family apart. For starters, in my daughter's room there was a huge, sooty streak directly above an electrical outlet. I would wash and scrub it off, only to have it return. I asked my neighbour if there had ever been a fire in the flat. She became incredibly agitated and told me that she didn't like to talk about those things. "If you keep your chin up and go about your business," she said, "everything will be fine".

It was around this time that my daughter began to develop "imaginary friends". She spoke of one in particular, a man called Robber Jones. She said that he didn't like her father because "he had a big knife". My husband did have a sword in the house, as he was practising laido (a martial art using swords). She went on to tell me that Robber Jones was killed by a big knife in France, during a big fire.

Rooms were frequently freezing, which we put down to poor insulation, but one second it would be lovely and warm, the next we would find ourselves covered in goosebumps. You could literally take one step forward and feel the cold, one step back and not feel it unless you stuck your hand out. The lights would turn off and on by themselves; lights that were switched on would suddenly explode completely by themselves. We called in an electrician, who chuckled when we told him. He did discover that all the fixtures were actually illegal as they

were pre-1940s... and duly changed them all. However, things only got worse.

I spent a lot of time alone in that flat, with my daughter at school and my husband at work. I began to experience long, drawn-out periods of depression and anxiety that actually led to me hearing voices. I would hear my husband cough and go running to the door, only to find no one there; then I would hear him laughing and trying to stifle laughter, so I soon became convinced that he was playing around, and grew suspicious – we would end up fighting about the most ludicrous things. I was on the verge of a breakdown. I would be washing my hair, and then be overcome with a sensation that if I opened my eyes it would be to someone ready and waiting to plunge a knife into me... I would lie frozen in the bath for what seemed an eternity before the sensation would pass. I began to see my GP quite regularly, as everything in my world seemed to be out of whack.

Pieces of my jewellery would go missing. I would accuse both daughter and husband of getting into my things, only to find the missing item back in place a day later. This would convince me that my husband was having an affair, giving my pieces to a girlfriend and then panicking and retrieving them when he realised that I had "caught him". Crazy! How he put up with it, I have no idea.

Then my husband began to have his own experiences. One morning, he placed his wallet on the bedside table, only to discover it was gone when he was ready to go to work. We both searched all over and he became very agitated. At this point, I felt somewhat relieved that it wasn't just me going bonkers, and screamed out loud in the room, "Just put the wallet back! We don't like it here! We don't want to stay here any longer than we have to!" Both my husband and I stepped into the hallway and shut the door. We waited for a beat, and then opened the door to find the wallet sitting on the table, just where he said he had left it. We immediately left the flat. Stepping outside into the sun felt like an enormous weight was off our shoulders.

That evening, my husband decided to experiment. He took the batteries out of our remote control, and with both of us sitting on the

sofa with the TV 10ft (3m) away, he yelled into the air, "If there is a ghost in here, turn off my TV. I wanna go to bed." No sooner had the words been out of his mouth than the TV snapped off. He started yelling turn it on, turn it back on, but by this point I was terrified and hysterical, begging and crying for him to shut up. Neither one of us slept a wink that night.

It was during this time that we all began to see apparitions. I guess I always assumed that ghosts would be transparent, but that wasn't the case. My husband would awake in the night, seeing our daughter standing quietly at the edge of the bed, which would wake him fully. He would ask her what was wrong, but she would just leave. He would physically get out of bed during these times and inevitably wake me to tell me that when he checked, she was asleep... and is she sleepwalking?

I would be busy with a task in the kitchen or vacuuming the landing and see my daughter happily playing in my peripheral vision. It was only when I would look at her full on and ask her something, that she would stand erect and look at me with the most incredible sadness in her face. That sad look struck instant alarm, so I would go to investigate. On every one of these occasions I would find that she was actually sleeping and hadn't moved from the lounge sofa, where my husband had been watching TV for two hours – or some similar situation where she was with someone else.

None of our friends knew what was happening because we didn't

want to scare our daughter or deter anyone from visits. We had a young couple stay with us for a night. I awoke at 7am to find our guests dressed and ready to go, not even willing to stay for a morning coffee! As they were close friends, I asked them what the problem was and they said, rather incredulously: "Didn't you hear what was happening?"

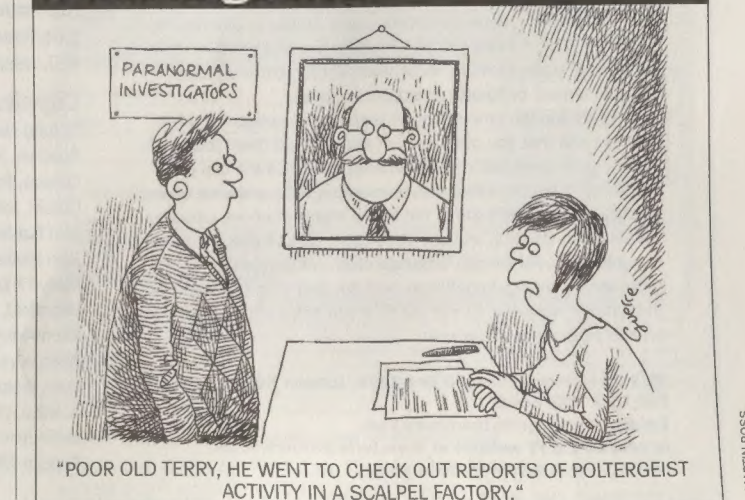
Half an hour after they left, they called from their mobile phone, to thank us very much but tell us that they would never stay in that flat again. As there were only two bedrooms, they had to sleep in the lounge. Apparently, all night long the TV and stereo turned themselves off and on. They unplugged both machines, but they continued to turn themselves on. A young woman was walking the landing, so they were afraid to leave the room. We never heard a thing and slept like babies.

We finally found a new home two months later. From the minute we walked over the new threshold, I felt a warm sunny feeling, and since then we haven't had any home troubles that couldn't be explained.

In the summer of 2001, I shared a table in a busy coffeehouse with a nice couple. They told me that they had just bought a home, and finally were out of "that hideous flat". I laughed and told them that I used to live in a hideous flat, on Molyneux Park Road. It turned out to be 5C, the very flat we endured for nearly two years, and like my family, they couldn't get out of there fast enough.

**Denny Casely**  
By email

## C'est la guerre



"POOR OLD TERRY, HE WENT TO CHECK OUT REPORTS OF POLTERGEIST ACTIVITY IN A SCALPEL FACTORY."



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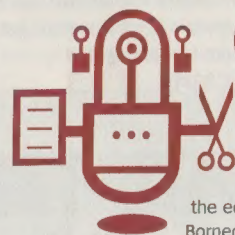
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## Why Fortean?



**F**ortean Times is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874-1932). Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data was ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature

of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

From the viewpoint of mainstream science, its function is elegantly stated in a line from Enid Welsford's book on the mediæval fool: "The Fool does not lead a revolt against the Law; he lures us into a region of the spirit where... the writ does not run."

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox.

**FT** toes no party line.

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